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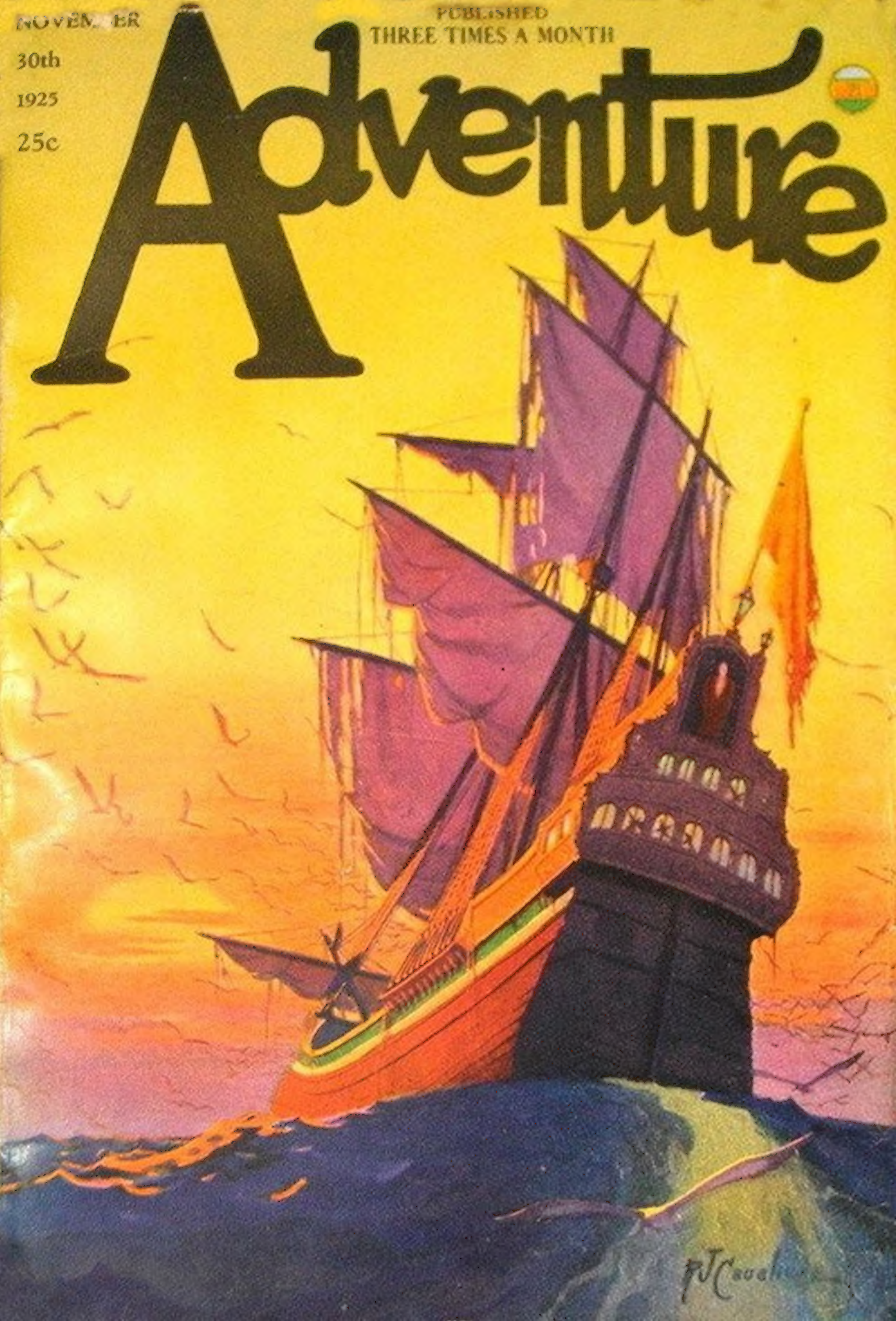
Adventure



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THERE'S a devil inside of you. He's trying to kill you. Look out for him! He tells you not to work so hard. What's the use—the boss only piles more work on you. He tells you not to bother with your body. Do you recognize him? Of course you do. He's in us all. He's a murderer of ambition. He's a liar and a fool. **Kill Him!** If you don't, he will kill you.

Saved

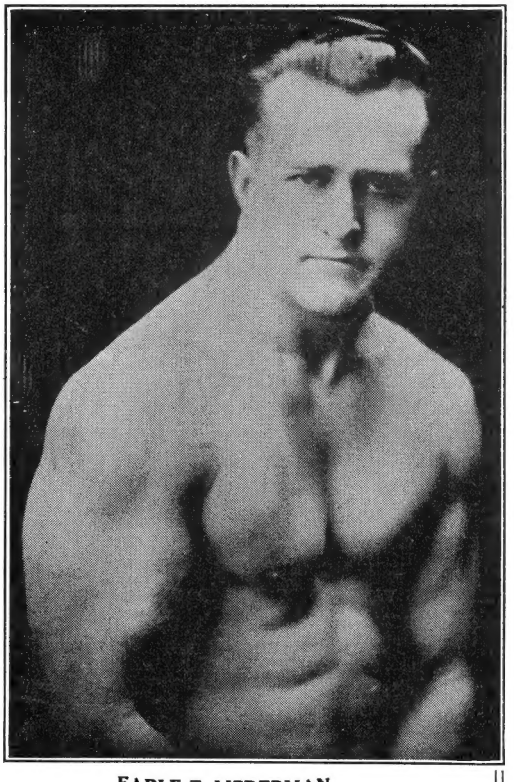
Thank your lucky stars you have another man inside of you. He's the human dynamo. He fills you full of pep and ambition. He keeps you alive—on fire. He urges you on in your daily tasks. He makes you strive for bigger and better things to do. He makes you crave for life and strength. He teaches you that the weak fall by the wayside, but the strong succeed. He shows you that exercise builds live tissue—live tissue is muscle—muscle means strength—strength is power. Power brings success! That's what you want, and gosh darn your old hide, you're going to get it.

Which Man Will It Be?

It's up to you—Set your own future. You want to be the Human Dynamo? Fine! Well, let's get busy. That's where I come in. That's my job. Here's what I'll do for you.

In just 30 days I'll increase your arm one full inch with real live, animated muscle. Yes, and I'll add two inches to your chest in the same time. Pretty good, eh? That's nothing. Now come the works. I'll build up your shoulders. I'll deepen your chest. I'll strengthen your whole body. I'll give you arms and legs like pillars. I'll literally pack muscle up your stomach and down your back. Meanwhile I'll work on those inner muscles surrounding your vital organs. You'll feel the thrill of life shooting up your old back bone and throughout your entire system. You'll feel so full of life, you'll shout to the world, "I'm a man and I can prove it."

Sounds good, what? But listen! That isn't all. I'm not just promising these things. I guarantee them! It's a sure bet. Oh boy! Let's ride.



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ADVENTURE
Nov. 30th, 1925

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Volume 55
Number 6

First–Last–Always!

MEN have been known to go for months without shelter, for weeks without food and for days without water, but no one can live for more than a few *minutes* without air.

Breathing is the first necessity of life—yet few of us know how to breathe to develop our bodies and to improve our health. If we could be always in fresh air taking plenty of exercise, our usual undirected, instinctive breathing would naturally develop to give us better health. Nature would take care of us. But the conditions in which we live, the stress of present day life, cause us to accumulate an excess of poisonous waste products in our bodies. To help dispose of these we should go beyond instinctive breathing and at frequent times during the day mentally direct the breaths we take.

AIR!

Baby's first cry! However it may sound to grandmother's ears, it is music to the baby's mother. Under the spell of her eager imagination that thin little cry is a a call for her. But what he really is crying for is *air*. In the Land of Unborn Babies he had no need to use his lungs. But here, in the great wide world, his first need is air and through every moment of his life he will demand air.

Count Your Breaths—

How many breaths a minute do you take? Stop now with your watch in hand and for 60 seconds count them. Fifteen to twenty short, top-of-your-lungs breaths? You are not breathing deeply. Occasionally you should take six or eight long, leisurely breaths a minute—so deep that the diaphragm is expanded and the ribs are barreled out. Several times a day stop what you are doing, stand straight with head up, shoulders back and *breathe*—always through the nose.

Try it this way—inhale, one, two, three, four; hold, five; exhale, six, seven, eight, nine; relax, ten. This will give you six breaths a minute—quiet, unhurried breathing. After a time your unconscious breathing may become deeper and you will begin to feel a new and delightful sense of buoyant power.

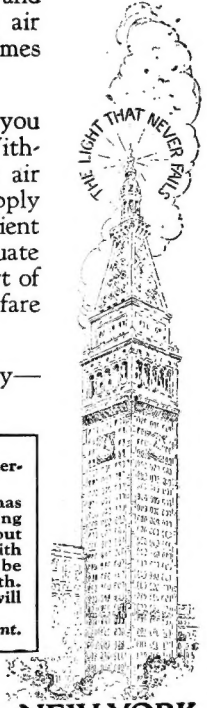
Deep breathing exercises should be taken night and morning. Empty the lungs with each breath. This is important because fresh air removes harmful waste matter in the blood.

That "Stitch in the side"—

Have you ever felt a stitch in the side when running? This is a warning—not always that your heart is weak, or that you have indigestion, but sometimes that your lungs are unaccustomed to being filled to their full capacity. One-third of the lung cells of the average person is unused. These cells tend to collapse and stick together. When the air is forced into them, it sometimes causes pain.

Your health demands that you should breathe properly. Without deep breathing of fresh air there cannot be an ample supply of oxygen. Without sufficient oxygen there cannot be adequate growth or repair of any part of the body, nor vigorous warfare against disease.

Begin today to breathe deeply—breathe for health.



About one out of six of the total number of deaths in the United States each year is caused by diseases which affect the lungs. Pulmonary tuberculosis and pneumonia claim more than 210,000 victims annually. Ten years ago the death-rate from tuberculosis was sixty per cent higher than it is today. Only a short time ago it was thought that fresh air must be kept away from patients suffering from lung troubles! Today it is known that fresh air is one of the main aids in getting well—and this knowledge has helped to produce the marked decrease in tuberculosis death-rate.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has prepared a booklet giving simple and interesting health rules, including scientific advice about fresh air and proper breathing. These rules, with the simple breathing exercise given above, can be followed by anybody who wishes better health. Send for a copy of "How to Live Long". It will be mailed free.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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"BE BOLD!" counseled the Druid before *Tros'* great vermilion ship sailed against the forces of Rome. In the intrigue-ridden town of Gades he found need for all his courage and wisdom. "THE DANCING GIRL OF GADES," a complete novel by Talbot Mundy, will appear in the next issue.

SLIM EVANS could fly a 'plane, but when it came to handling moving picture affairs he was inclined to grab the wrong lever. "DUMPY DUCKS," a complete novelette by Thomson Burtis, will appear in the next issue.

IN SPITE of the tragic happening at the cricket club, the blue clay and the man with the yellow mustache, *Professor Poggioli*, American psychologist, decides to remain a while in the pleasant, sunny island of Barbados. "CRICKET," a complete novelette by T. S. Stribling, will appear in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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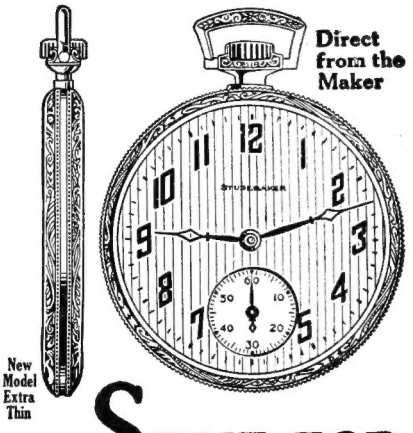

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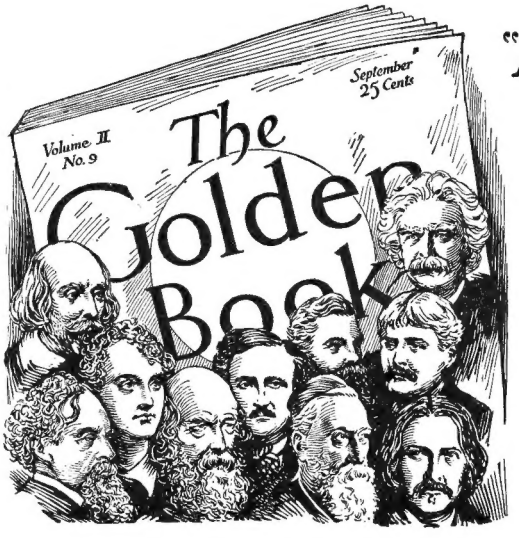

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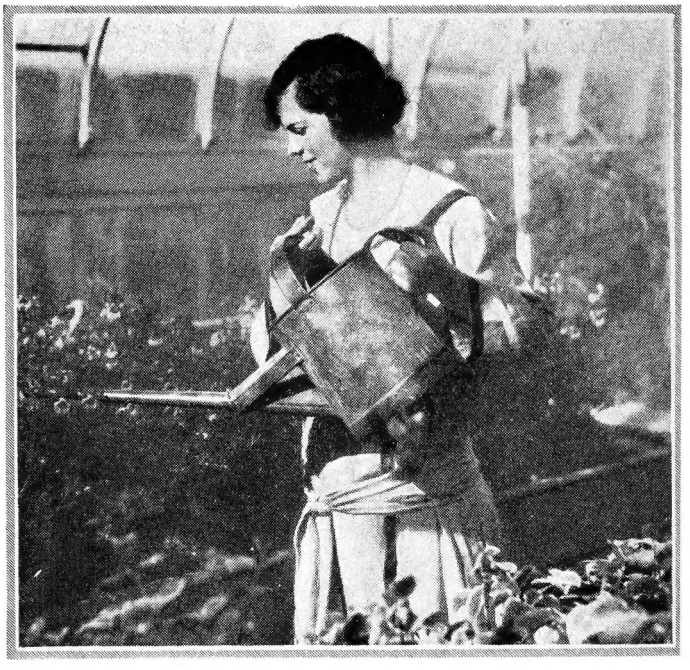

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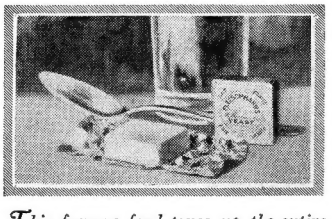

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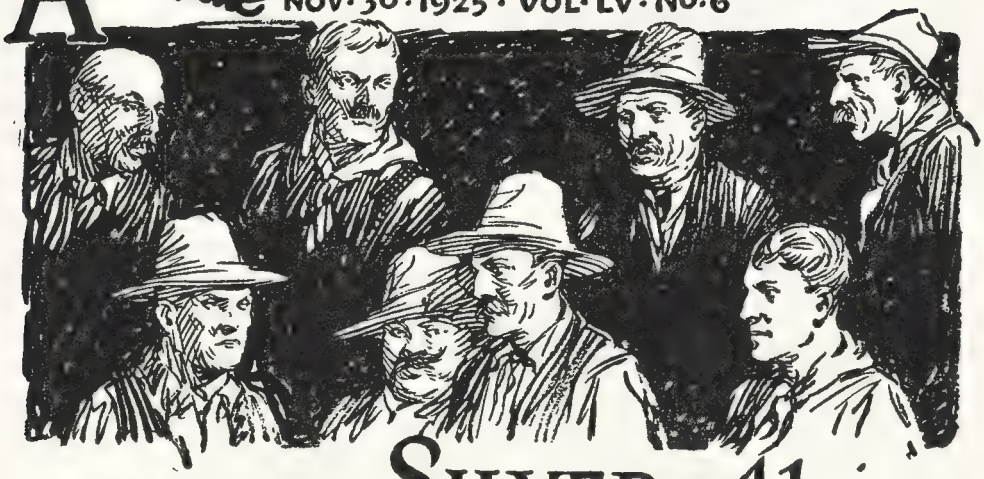

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Author of "Hidden Blood," "The Lovable Liar," etc.

"SKEETER BILL" SARG, newly elected sheriff of Moon River County, sat awkwardly at his desk, squinting closely at a strange cowboy who was perched on a chair opposite the sheriff.

This cowboy was not a stranger to Crescent City, but he was to Skeeter Bill, who knew only a few of the riders in that part of the county. This cowboy was of medium height, with black, curly hair cut rather short, high cheek-bones, a slightly flattened nose and deep-set brown eyes. His mouth was narrow, with rather prominent lips, his chin square, with scarcely any depression between his lower lip and chin.

Sitting on his boot-heels, humped back against the office wall was "Kaintuck" Kennedy, Skeeter Bill's deputy, trying to roll a cigaret with one hand. A pile of torn cigaret papers and spilled tobacco attested to the fact that Kaintuck was not at all proficient.

Skeeter Bill picked up a silver dollar from his desk and looked at it closely. To him it was a perfectly good dollar, a trifle new, but good, honest coin of the realm. He looked back at the stranger.

"How can yuh tell?" he asked.

The strange cowboy smiled knowingly.

"Easy enough. I've tested a good many of 'em, Sheriff. That is only one of many."

"Uh-huh."

Skeeter took several silver dollars from his pocket and handed them across the table. Unhesitatingly the cowboy selected two of the dollars.

"Yuh mean to say that they're bad?" asked Skeeter.

"Bad. Yuh might say, they're both bad and good. In fact, they are almost too good, Sheriff. Combination of lead, silver and glass. Oh sure, they sound good. It would take an expert to detect them—but nevertheless they are counterfeit."

"Uh-huh. Where do yuh reckon they're made?"

"Somewhere in Moon River Valley." The man lowered his voice. "It has taken the Government over a year to trace it to this valley. My work has been confined to range cases, because I can qualify as a cowpuncher.

"I came here with the intention of working alone. It is not our policy to take the local officers into our confidence until the actual arrests are ready to be made. I have

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been working at the Tin Cup ranch for a month, and before that I was at the Lazy H.

"But I seem to be up against a stone wall, Sheriff. That money comes out of Moon River Valley, just as sure as eggs are eggs; but I am free to admit that there isn't a clue of any kind to work on."

"Yuh said yore name was Frank Moran, didn't yuh?"

"Yeah."

"Pleased t'meetcha, Moran. That's Kaintuck Kennedy over by the wall, Moran. He's my deputy."

Kaintuck looked up and grinned—

"Howdy. Didja ever learn to roll 'em with one hand?"

"Never tried it," smiled Moran. "Looks easy."

"Yeah, it does," admitted Kaintuck. "Like catchin' counterfeiters."

"That's right," laughed Moran. "Mebby you've got an idea how to catch 'em, Kennedy."

"Uh-huh. Use the same scheme that 'Frenchy' Le Blanc used. He was runnin' a sort of a store up in the Bitter Roots, and he does a credit business. Frenchy don't know one figure from another; so he figures out a lot of funny marks that mean so-and-so owes him a certain amount.

"He writes all these funny marks on a board, and when he collects all his debts, he planes the board off and starts in all over again. One day he sells somebody a case of aigs, and forgets who it is.

"So at the end of the month he charges up one case of aigs to everybody that deals with him. He had three fights before he hit the right party, but he got paid for his aigs—four times. Now, my idea would be to arrest everybody in Moon River Valley that had one of them bad dollars in their pocket."

"You'd probably get into a lot of trouble," laughed Moran.

"Yeah—" dryly. "And you'd probably get a —— of a lot of criminals, too."

"Kaintuck is a pessimist," grinned Skeeter. "He never sees any good in anythin'."

"Only when I look in the mirror, Skeeter. Say, Moran, is all them dollars the same date?"

"No. They've made several molds. Most of 'em are from 1899 to 1906. I'm expectin' you boys to keep all this under your hats, of course."

"Sure thing," nodded Skeeter. "It's somethin' I don't know a danged thing about. I dunno how they'd go ahead to make the money; but I'm takin' yore word for it, Moran. Quite likely they'll object to bein' caught, eh?"

"Uncle Sam does not deal lightly with counterfeiters."

"You've been takin' a big chance—workin' alone."

"We have to take a chance." Moran got to his feet. "If it was known who I am, I wouldn't last a week. I am lettin' you in on this, Sheriff, because I need help, and because of another reason. Here."

He took a letter from his pocket and handed it to Skeeter Bill. It read—

FRANK MORAN:

Would advise taking up matter with new sheriff. Know him to be capable man. Must get action soon or relinquish the case, because it is taking too long to suit the Department. My regards to the sheriff. (Signed) LONG.

"'Shorty' Long, U. S. marshal, eh?" smiled Skeeter Bill, handing back the letter. "Yeah, I sure know him."

"Good old Shorty," nodded Moran. "He's sure a white man."

"Yeah," nodded Skeeter thoughtfully. "Shorty sure is. Yuh never happened to hear him tell about the time he herded sheep down in Sundance Flats, did yuh?" Skeeter laughed softly.

"No, he never told me about it," grinned Moran. "But one of his deputies started to tell me the story one day, and somethin' interrupted him; so I never heard it."

"Well, you git him to tell yuh," laughed Skeeter. "I'd only spoil it."

"I sure will," grinned Moran. "Well, I'll mosey along. Probably drop in here in a few days and see what you've found out. In case yuh write to Long, tell him I'm doin' the best I can. Yuh might explain what I'm up against, Sheriff. I've tried to show 'em, but they probably don't understand.

"In another letter he suggests sendin' in another man to help me, but that would only complicate matters, don'tcha see. These counterfeiters are always lookin' for Government men, and they'd be suspicious of a stranger."

"That's a cinch," nodded Skeeter. "I'll see what I can find out and let yuh know. If it was rustlers or bank robbers, I'd stand a show; but bad money is sure a new proposition to me." He shook hands with Moran, who went back up the street. Skeeter sat

down and squinted at Kaintuck, who was still tearing cigaret papers and spilling tobacco.

"How long do yuh reckon it'll take yuh to learn to roll one cigaret one-handed, Kaintuck?" he asked curiously.

"How long?" Kaintuck grinned lazily. "Well, I dunno, Skeeter. Prob'ly as long as it'll take you to catch a counterfeiter."

"I'm scared yo're goin' to waste a lot of tobacco, cowboy."

"And yo're goin' to waste a lot of time, Skeeter."

"Time don't mean nothin' on this job," laughed Skeeter. "I'm goin' to be here for two years."

IT WAS Skeeter's first month as sheriff of Moon River County, and the job was still a mystery to him. He knew nothing of clerical work. Kaintuck Kennedy knew even less than Skeeter Bill.

Even the election was a surprize to Skeeter. He had not expected to be elected. In fact he had won by eleven votes, which was a substantial majority in Moon River.

Skeeter was tall, thin, and with a serious expression. But he was not always serious. Back of those level gray eyes and inquisitive eyebrows was an over-developed sense of humor, and he had the faculty of wearing the same expression under all conditions.

As one of his staunch supporters had said—

"Skeeter Bill shore is fitted to this new job. Havin' been a real good horse-thief, he's able to think like one; and that helps a lot, when yo're huntin' one."

All of which shows that Skeeter Bill's past did not interfere with his present and future. Until his election he had been working for the KG7 outfit, twenty miles south of Crescent City, the county seat. He and Kaintuck had bunked together, and it was entirely fitting that he make Kaintuck his deputy.

Kaintuck was the opposite physically to Skeeter Bill. He was not over five feet seven inches in height, rather stout and bow-legged. He tried hard to wear a mustache, but it was rather a dismal failure; being whispy and yellow, one end insisting on twisting toward his chin, while the other pointed indifferently toward his eye.

"Looks like somebody had pasted a danged S on yore lip," was Skeeter's opinion. "Yuh ought to get a crutch for one end, or hang a weight on the other."

Crescent City was a nondescript cattle town. A branch line of the N. W. railroad swung in out of the desert, wound its way through a pass, and into the valley; only to leave by another heavily graded pass.

The main street of the town was crooked, as though one end of the place did not care to have the other end know what it was doing. Being the county seat, it naturally became the center of industry. Twenty miles to the north was a fairly new mining district, which outfitted at Crescent City, although the Silver Bell mine was the only one to employ any great number of men.

A two-horse stage made tri-weekly trips to the Silver Bell district, carrying the mail and express. It was a bad road, built with an idea of economy, and naturally followed the lines of least resistance. An empty buggy was a good load for two horses, but the turns were so short and the road so narrow that four horses would have been just two too many.

There were a number of cattle outfits in the valley, but the Tin Cup and the Lazy H were the largest. The Tin Cup brand was owned by "Monk" Clark, who raised both horses and cattle, while the Lazy H, Sam Ertle's brand, raised only such horses as were needed in handling their cattle.

Both Clark and Ertle had worked against Skeeter in the campaign. Clark had thought himself sort of a political boss in Moon River County, and a defeat did not please him in the least.

Monk Clark was a big, burly man, middle-aged, and with a hair-trigger disposition. Sam Ertle was small, wiry, soft-spoken, and a very capable cattleman. He had only operated the Lazy H for about fifteen months, having bought it in at a sale, after Cleve Hart, the original owner, had been killed.

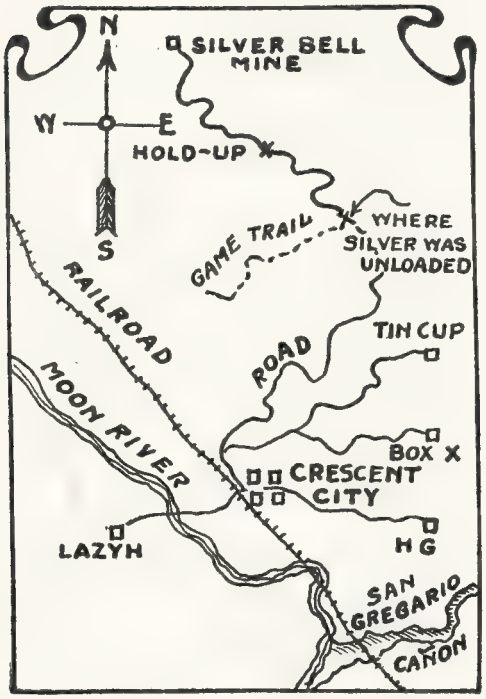
Skeeter Bill had never had any serious trouble with either of them, and their opposition to his election was merely because of political differences.

For several minutes after Moran left the office Skeeter silently contemplated his two counterfeit dollars. Kaintuck continued to tear papers and spill tobacco.

"You got any silver dollars?" asked Skeeter. Kaintuck looked up at him.

"Have I got any silver dollars?" Kaintuck rubbed his chin and squinted at Skeeter.

"Cowboy, I reckon I know what yo're thinkin' about, and all I can do is shake my head and hope you'll believe me. I know how yuh feel about them two dollars that



just spoiled on yuh.' Yo're melancholy, that's all—and misery likes company."

"But it ain't ethical for yuh to spend bad money."

"I ain't spendin' it, am I?"

"That's true. If I was a detective I'd know what to do. Dang that feller, anyway! I'm supposed to investigate on the quiet. Investigate what?"

"Counterfeitin'," grinned Kaintuck. "Kinda make a house-to-house canvass, and ask everybody if they've seen anybody makin' bad money. Yuh might start out by—"

"Gettin' killed," finished Skeeter. "When it comes to detectin', me and you run a dead-heat."

"Prob'ly. Still there's one satisfaction, Skeeter; yuh don't have to catch 'em. There ain't nothin' in yore oath of office that says you've got to catch counterfeiters."

"No, that's right, too, Kaintuck. I wish somebody would rob a bank or steal a horse to take this off my mind."

"Mine too," said Kaintuck seriously. "I ain't took a shot at anybody since I've been a deputy. ——! If I thought that all sheriffs and deputies was as incompetent as we are, I'd resign right now and take up horse stealin'. I shore would, Skeeter."

Kaintuck walked to the office door and slouched against the side.

"Train's in," he announced.

A few moments later he looked back at Skeeter and said—

"Looks like a couple of drummers had come in, Skeeter."

"Tell 'em we ain't buyin' nothin' today."

"One of 'em has got on a hard hat. I'll betcha they're comin' to see us, Skeeter."

Skeeter got to his feet and walked to the doorway, where he watched the two middle-aged, well-dressed men approach the office door. He nodded to them and they stopped.

"Howdy, folks," said Skeeter pleasantly.

"How do you do?" said one of them, looking at the sign over the door. "Thought perhaps you would be able to furnish us with some information. We are on our way to the Silver Bell mine, and it seemed impossible for us to get reliable information as to when the stage trips are made."

"You just about hit it," said Skeeter, squinting up the street. "The stage is about due to travel, I think. Stay on this side of the street and yuh can't miss it."

They thanked him and went on.

"Them ain't drummers," declared Kaintuck.

"No-o-o? Jist how do yuh read their sign?"

"Don't have to read, Skeeter. What in —— would a drummer do at the Silver Bell—sell 'em some silver?"

Skeeter grinned slowly.

"You've got all the instincts of a successful detective, Kaintuck Kennedy. Let's me and you go and find somethin' to eat. We ought to be detectives enough to find food."

THEY closed the office, crossed the street and walked past the big Half-Moon Saloon and gambling house to a little Chinese restaurant. Several cowboys were eating their noonday meal, and one of them waved a fork at them as they sat down.

"That's 'Curley' Adams," said Kaintuck. "He worked for the KG76 before yuh came, Skeeter. He's with the Tin Cup now."

Adams was a young man, with a pleasant, devil-may-care sort of face, and a winning smile. In a few minutes he came over and shook hands with Kaintuck, who introduced him to Skeeter.

"Yo're with the Tin Cup, ain't yuh, Curley?" asked Kaintuck.

"Yeah. I've been out there almost a year now, Kaintuck. How do yuh like bein' a deputy sheriff?"

"Got a good bed," grinned Kaintuck. "Been settin' on a chair for so long that my legs prob'ly won't bend sideways enough to let me set in a saddle. Yo're stickin' to the job kinda steady, ain't yuh, Curley?"

"Yeah," Curley flushed slightly. "Savin' my money these days. Yuh see, I've kinda got an idea I'd like to have somethin' for myself, Kaintuck."

"Yea-a-a-a-ah? My ——!" Kaintuck opened his eyes wide and stared at Skeeter. "I'll betcha the boy's in love!"

Curley's ears grew red and he tried to smile.

"Don't try to fool yore Uncle Dudley," warned Kaintuck. "I *sabe* all about it. Now, you take my advice and—"

"Don't do it, Adams," advised Skeeter. "I mean—don't take his advice. He's never been married, and I don't reckon he's ever been in love; so tighten yore own cinch."

"Ain't never been in love!" Kaintuck snorted loudly. "Say, I'm the jigger that showed Romeo what to say."

"You'd run if a woman tried to speak to yuh."

"Shore I would. 'F you had as much experience as I have, you'd run, too. I could write books about my love experiences."

Curley Adams laughed and walked out with the other cowboys from the Tin Cup ranch. Kennedy squinted after them, a grin on his lips.

"I wonder who the girl is, Skeeter?" he said. "Curley shore is a real nice boy. He ain't as wild as the rest of that gang, and he's got brains enough to start out for himself."

"Other folks' matrimonial affairs don't interest me none," said Skeeter thoughtfully. "I can't think of nothin' but bad dollars these days. Tomorrow me and you start detectin'."

"Sounds good," grinned Kaintuck. "I've read detective stories and they shore listened real good. But yuh got to find yuh a clue, Skeeter. Yuh never get nowhere without a clue."

"I've got me one."

"Yuh have? Gee, that's fine! Lemme hear it."

"I will not. Go get yore own clue, Kaintuck."

"Shucks! Ain't it big enough for two of us?"

"Well," explained Skeeter softly, "it ain't big enough yet. Mebbe it'll grow, and if it gets big enough, and you ain't got one by that time, mebbe I'll let yuh gnaw on a corner of mine."

A BUCKBOARD, drawn by a pair of tired-looking bronchos, bumped along over the dusty road, heading away from Crescent City and going toward the HG ranch, which was located about five miles east of the town.

Hank Gregory, the owner of the ranch, humped over in his seat, the reins held loosely in his big hands, while beside him sat his twenty-year-old daughter, Joy. The rear of the buckboard held a trunk and numerous hand-baggage.

There had been no rain for months in the Moon River valley, and the yellow dust of the road was fetlock deep to the horses. It rolled up on the wheels, drifting away in clouds to turn more gray the immediate landscape.

It was a fairly steady climb from town to the HG ranch, the road winding through brushy coulees, twisting to higher ground, where patches of alkali, like spilled mortar, made huge gaps in the purple and gray of the sage.

To the eastward towered the blue line of the main divide, as if a painter had swept a full brush of blue to break the line between the gray of the hills and the pale blue of the sky. Grasshoppers buzzed and crackled away from the plodding team, and from along the slope came the piping bark of a prairie-dog, as though protesting against any one stirring up so much dust.

Gregory was a big, slow-moving sort of person, with iron-gray hair and a deeply lined face. Joy did not resemble her paternal ancestor in any way. She was not beautiful, but by no means unbeautiful. Joy Gregory was just an average girl; possibly a trifle more capable than the average,

due to living where capability rates higher than feminine attractiveness.

She studied the serious profile of her father's face for several moments, as they rode along through the filmy dust.

"Dad, you don't seem glad to have me back," she said.

He glanced sideways at her, spat over the wheel and cleared his throat.

"No, you don't need to fix up any excuse," she said quickly. "You can't blame me, Dad. Aunt Emma died so suddenly that I hardly knew what to do; and you couldn't expect me to stay down there in Cheyenne alone. I know what you want to say. You contend that a cattle ranch is no place for a young lady. Well, what's to be done about it? I'm here."

"Yeah, yo're here," nodded Gregory grimly.

"And I've been away a year," said Joy slowly, "and my own father never said he was glad to see me."

"Joy, don't say that. I'm glad to see yuh. But I've always said—"

"That a cattle ranch wasn't any place for your daughter. My mother was the daughter of a rancher."

"Yeah, that's true."

"And I'm as good at punching cows as any man, Dad."

Gregory snorted and helped himself to another huge chew of tobacco. He had his own ideas of how his daughter should be raised.

"And besides," Joy smiled softly, "I might marry a cowboy."

"That's what I reckoned—" dryly. "Curley Adams, eh?"

Joy laughed.

"*Quien sabe,* Dad? I haven't seen Curley for over a year. But he writes wonderful letters. Curley is educated. He has been saving his money all that year, and—who knows?"

"Yeah! He must 'a' saved as much as four hundred dollars in a year. That won't give him much of a start."

"You started on nothing, Dad."

Gregory winced slightly, but did not reply.

"And he's honest," continued Joy. "That is something that you can't say about a majority of the cowpunchers in the Moon River hills."

"Well, we won't argue that point, Joy. There's a lot of honest men in the poorhouse."

"But not many in the penitentiary."

Gregory laughed shortly.

"I've had the last word on the HG ranch for over a year, but I'm runnin' second now. Well, there's the old starve-to-death layout, Joy. It ain't changed much in a year, has it?"

They had driven around the point of a hill, where they might look down at the sprawling buildings of the little ranch. It was located on a little flat, at the mouth of a cañon; a huddle of one-story buildings, sheds and corrals. None of the buildings had ever felt the caress of a paint-brush.

Two huge oaks shaded the rambling old ranch-house, giving a note of color to the otherwise drab exterior. Several horses drowsed inside the pole-corrals, a tall, red steer poked around the fence, picking up an occasional straw, while a flock of mongrel chickens chased grasshoppers in the front yard of the ranch-house.

"No-o-o-o, it hasn't changed much," agreed Joy. "I don't believe that the red steer was there the last time I saw it; so there is some change, Dad. I don't suppose the house has been cleaned since I left."

"Yes it has. When I got yore letter, I had old 'Calamity' give it a cleanin'."

"I'll bet it was good," laughed Joy. "How is old Calamity?"

"Well, I dunno. The —— old mossback is prob'ly a little worse than he was a year ago."

They drove up to the front of the ranch-house and Calamity came out to greet them. No one had ever known—that is, no one in Moon River Valley had ever known—what his right name was.

He was just Calamity; a thin-faced, hawk-nosed, little old man; philosopher, liar, who loved his friends, but cursed them as thoroughly as he did his enemies. Calamity lived almost entirely in the past, when he was a gunman, and when, as he expressed it—

"There wasn't a —— stran' of bob-wire as long as yore finger from Laredo to the No'th Pole."

"Hello, Calamity!" called Joy.

The old man came slowly out to the buckboard, squinting at her, as if trying to remember her, although he knew she was coming.

"Well, 'f it ain't little Joy!" he exploded. "Ha, ha, ha, ha! Growed up so I didn't know yuh. Took one look at yuh, and I

says to myself, 'Darned if Hank ain't brought a strange woman home with him.' I did so.

"Brought yore trunk, too. Look at the va-lises! Whooee! Say, I knowed a woman that traveled plumb from the Gulf of Mexico to Astoria, Oregon, and didn't even have a pocket-book."

Joy laughed, as she dismounted—

"That woman must have had a tough time, Calamity."

"She died before she started the trip," laughed Calamity. "They took her no'th in a casket. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Well, I s'pose I've got to unload that trunk. Oh, I ain't foolin' myself. I know what a woman's trunk usually weighs."

Joy laughed and ran up the front steps in to the house, while Gregory helped Calamity remove the trunk. Joy looked around the living-room, a frown between her eyes. Everywhere was dirt. She kicked aside a Navajo rug, disclosing a great accumulation. Calamity had made the cleaning as easy as possible for himself.

Her father and Calamity came in with the trunk and found her inspecting Calamity's trash-heap.

"That's a woman for yuh," wailed Calamity. "They've got to uncover all the scandal they can find. Them dirt-heaps has been as safe as a church all this time," Calamity shook his head sadly. "I suppose you'll be washin' winders next."

"They need it," said Joy. "Why, you can't see through any of them."

"Well, why should yuh? There ain't nothin' to look at out there, Joy. And nobody can shoot yuh through a winder they can't see through. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'd rather be shot than to live like a pig," retorted Joy. "Put a kettle of water on the stove."

"Yes'm," Calamity became very meek and hastened to comply with her orders.

He knew that his usual equivocations would have little effect on Joy.

He put a big kettle of water on the stove, filled up the fire-box and went outside, where he joined Gregory, who was unhitching the team.

"Joy goin' to stay here?" asked Calamity.

"Yeah. Where in —— else can she stay?"

"Yuh don't need to git mad at me about it, Hank. I jist asked, tha'sall. A year has shore made a lot of difference with that girl, Hank. She's a woman."

"Uh-huh."

Gregory stripped the harness off a horse and let the animal loose. He hung up the harness and leaned against a corner of the shed, watching two riders who were coming in from the west.

IT WAS Monk Clark and Frank Moran, the government detective, who had talked with Skeeter Bill. They rode up to Gregory and Calamity. Clark had seen Joy through the open door, as he rode past the house.

"Howdy, gents," he greeted them.

They returned the greeting in kind. Clark jerked a gloved thumb toward the house, as though in interrogation.

"Joy came this mornin'," said Gregory. "I got a letter from her last night, and had to drive in this mornin'. Her aunt died in Cheyenne, and she had to come home."

"Huh!"

Clark turned his head and squinted toward the house, where Joy was hanging some Navajo rugs over the railing of the porch.

"Young lady, eh?" smiled Moran.

"Woman," corrected Calamity.

Monk Clark smiled. He was a big, raw-boned individual, possibly forty years of age. His face was heavily lined, rather sullen in repose, his eyes scarcely ever more than half-open. His mouth was wide, thin-lipped, and decorated with a black, brush-like mustache.

Clark wanted to boss Moon River valley politically, and had succeeded fairly well until the recent election. His candidates for prosecuting attorney and sheriff had both been defeated, and those were the two offices that Clark particularly wanted to dominate.

"Yeah, she's a woman now," nodded Clark.

"And a pretty one," added Moran. "I'd like to meet her, Gregory."

Hank Gregory squinted at Moran.

"Yeah? Well, I reckon yuh can. C'mon."

The four men walked to the porch, and Joy shook hands with Monk Clark before she was introduced to Frank Moran. After the introduction Joy excused herself and went back to her work.

"Hm-m-m-m," mused Clark aloud. "And she's only been away a little over a year, eh? Big change, Hank. Goin' to keep her here at the ranch?"

"Until she mates up with some cowpuncher, I s'pose."

"And that won't be long," laughed Moran. "I haven't seen many like her in Moon River valley."

"Don't let yore rope drag too much," advised Clark coldly.

Moran laughed softly.

"My rope ain't draggin', Boss. But I've got a good pair of eyes."

A few minutes later Clark and Moran left the ranch and rode toward Crescent City. Clark seemed very thoughtful, and his demeanor drew a smile from Moran.

"That HG ranch ain't such a nice place for a young lady," offered Moran.

"No," said Clark shortly. "Joy is a nice girl."

"Looks nice."

"Yeah."

THEY rode in to Crescent City and tied their horses at the Half-Moon hitch-rack. It was in the middle of the week, and there was little activity in Crescent City, except on Saturday and Sunday.

Curley Adams was coming up the street, and met them at the door of the Half-Moon.

"How soon can yuh give me my time, Monk?" asked Curley.

"Eh? You quittin' the Tin Cup, Curley?"

"Yeah. I just bought out the old Box X brand."

Clark shoved the sombrero back on his head and squinted at Curley.

"You bought the old Box X ranch?"

"Well, there wasn't much to buy," admitted Curley. "The old buildings are pretty badly shot to pieces, and there ain't nothin' much left, except the brand—but it's a start."

"Yea-a-ah, I suppose it is," Monk Clark grinned slowly. "All yuh need is some cattle and horses, Curley."

"Well, they'll come, Monk."

"Uh-huh," Monk scratched his chin reflectively and smiled at Curley. "One thing yuh got to remember, young man—there's a maverick law in this country now. All mavericks belong to the Cattlemen's Association. It ain't what it used to be."

"When you started, eh?"

Moran laughed, when Monk's ears turned red. It was well known that Monk Clark had been a great gatherer of mavericks—unbranded calves, which had been weaned, and on which any man might put his own brand.

It had been a legitimate procedure, until the practise became such a source of profit that some men did not wait for the calf to desert its mother. They forced the issue and got rich on the results. It was a common occurrence for one man's cows to bring in twin calves, while the cows of his neighbor brought in nothing but a sad expression.

"Well, yuh might say that things have changed," admitted Monk Clark coldly.

He did not relish having any one laugh at him.

"You've got about thirty-five dollars comin', ain't yuh, Curley? I'll buy a drink. C'mon."

They entered the saloon, ordered their drinks, and Clark counted out the money to Adams.

"So yo're goin' to be a cattleman, eh?" queried Monk. "It's a long, hard pull, Curley. Better stick to a salary."

Curley shook his head.

"Not for mine, Monk. I've got to get somethin' for myself, and I don't know anythin' but cows."

"You own a horse and a rope, don't yuh?" asked Moran.

Curley turned his head and looked at Moran.

"Yeah."

"Well, what more could yuh want? Many a puncher has got rich—if he didn't get hung in his own loop."

"Thank yuh," coldly.

"Oh, yuh don't need to get frosty, Adams. I don't know how yuh ever expect to make a livin' off that old Box X—and keep honest."

"Maybe I won't make a livin', Moran."

Moran laughed sneeringly.

"Oh, I guess you've got it figured out all right."

Splat! Curley's fist landed just beneath Moran's left cheek-bone, knocking him the full length of the bar, where he went flat on his back. A little lower and Moran would have been completely knocked out, but as it was he was so badly dazed that he goggled foolishly, while his left eye puffed rapidly, assuming a deep mauve tint.

"I'd swear to gosh, that was some punch," observed the bartender blandly.

He was used to scenes of violence. Curley

started toward the prostrate Moran, but Monk Clark stopped him.

"That's a-plenty," said Clark. "Let him get up now."

Moran got slowly to his feet, and Clark stepped aside, as though to give Moran a chance to retaliate; but the fight had all been taken out of Moran. He leaned against the bar and felt tenderly of his eye, which was completely shut now.

"Next time," said Curley softly, "yuh might do a little thinkin' before yuh speak, Moran."

"I might," nodded Moran. "Mebbe I will, and mebbe I won't."

He picked up his hat, yanked it viciously down on his head and strode toward the door.

Skeeter Bill and Kaintuck were coming in, and Moran halted to let them in before he went out. Kaintuck squinted at the swollen eye and whistled softly.

"Stick flew up and hit yuh, eh?" he questioned.

Moran snarled an unintelligible answer and brushed past them into the street.

"Must 'a' been at least a cord of wood," declared Kaintuck, as they turned toward the bar. Curley was caressing his sore knuckles, but grinned at them.

"What happened?" asked Kaintuck.

Monk Clark moved away from the bar, but did not speak to either Skeeter Bill or Kaintuck.

"Moran spoke before he thought," said the bartender.

"Didn't amount to anythin'," said Curley easily. "Merely a difference of opinion."

"Must 'a' been quite a difference," grinned Kaintuck. "I heard that yuh bought the old Box X, Curley."

"Uh-huh—today, Kaintuck."

"By golly, that's fine. And the next thing will be the weddin' bells, I suppose. Whooee! Won't we have some shivaree!"

"I'm afraid that's a long time off," said Curley.

"Picked the girl, ain'tcha?"

"Yeah, but—"

"Say! Yo're half married right now. Will she have yuh?"

"Wait a minute," cautioned Skeeter Bill. "This ain't no place to discuss such things, Kaintuck. Let's have a drink," Skeeter turned and motioned to Monk Clark.

"Have a drink?"

"No, thank yuh," Clark shook his head and walked out of the saloon.

Moran was not in sight. Clark crossed the street and walked to the little post-office, where he secured the ranch mail. Old Abe Neeley, who wore his glasses on the end of his nose and chewed tobacco so violently that the glasses seemed to oscillate continually, was the postmaster.

"How's everythin' at the Tin Cup, Monk?" he asked.

"All right, Abe. What's new around here?"

"New, ——! Nothin' ever happens around here. Didja know that Hank Gregory's daughter came home t'day? Changed a lot in a year. Stopped here for the mail, and I didn't hardly know her. Thought Joy Gregory was goin' t' be one of them runty kind of females; but she sure talled up considerable.

"Shouldn't be surprized 'f we had a weddin' around here after while, unless I've read the signs all wrong."

"Weddin'? Who's goin' to get married?" asked Monk.

Old Abe chawed reflectively for several moments.

"Well, as I done said, the signs look right. For the past year I've been gettin' letters for Curley Adams, sent from Cheyenne; and every few days he posts one to Miss Joy Gregory, Cheyenne. Big, fat letters too, Monk. A feller don't waste two-cent stamps and good paper, 'less he means somethin'."

Monk nodded thoughtfully. So that was who Kaintuck Kennedy had meant, he mused. Curley Adams had bought out the Box X, and was going to marry Joy Gregory.

"Of course, I may be wrong," admitted old Abe.

"Yuh may be," nodded Monk. "If I was you I wouldn't tell any more people about it. Yuh might get yore foot in it, Abe."

"Well, yeah, I s'pose that's right, too.

Clark left the post-office and met Moran at the hitch-rack, where they mounted their horses and started toward the Tin Cup ranch.

"Does yore eye hurt yuh much?" asked Clark.

"Not much;" sullenly.

"Get a piece of fresh beef from the cook and bind it on. It'll take the swellin' out."

"Yeah. I suppose that —— fool thinks he can do things like that and get away with it."

Monk Clark turned in his saddle and looked at the disgruntled Moran.

"You shot off yore face too much, Moran, and got what was comin' to yuh. Let it drop now. Curley is touchy about his honesty. He's on the square; so let him alone, *sabe?*"

"All right. Just the same—"

"We won't argue about it, Frank. He knocked yuh loose from yore boots and made yuh goggle like an owl. If it had been guns instead of fists, you'd be gettin' a measure for a pine overcoat. Curley Adams is just too —— smart with a gun for you."

"You talk like he was yore best friend, Monk."

"Well, he's not," denied Clark. "But I like to give the devil his due. I'm just tellin' yuh this, Frank; it might save yuh a lot of skin to know that Curley Adams can whip yuh at any mark in the road, and if yuh intend to swap lead with him—don't let him know it ahead of time, tha'sall."

"Much obliged, Monk."

"Oh, ——, yo're welcome."

KAINTUCK hungered for action. Neither he nor Skeeter Bill had seen anything of Frank Moran since Curley Adams had hit him, which was several days ago. Kaintuck complained audibly because Skeeter Bill would not share his clue with him. Then he grew skeptical, pessimistic.

"You ain't got no clue, Skeeter," he declared.

"I've got one," grinned Skeeter, "but I dunno how good it is. Let's me and you ride out and see what Curley Adams is doin' to the poor old Box X."

"That's a good idea, Skeeter. I'm shore tired of the fish-pots of civilization, and I crave a ride on a horse."

"Yuh mean flesh-pots, don'tcha, Kaintuck?"

"I stand corrected, but not convinced. A man's a sucker to stick around a town—and if a sucker ain't fish, I'm a camel."

They saddled their horses and rode out of town. The Box X was located northeast of Crescent City and about midway between the Tin Cup and the HG. It was a tumbledown sort of a place, the oldest brand in the valley, and in recent years it had gone from bad to worse.

Ownership had finally descended to Mike Gower, proprietor of a general merchandise store, who had probably taken it for a debt. There were several good water-holes, a running stream and a well-known brand.

Perhaps Curley Adams had visions of building it up again and making it a producing outfit. It would take several hundred dollars to repair the buildings—and it takes money to start a herd—but Curley was young and optimistic.

Skeeter and Kaintuck rode north out of town, left the main highway and went in to the hills. There was no hurry; so they poked along lazily. The average cowpuncher is not a fast rider, except in an emergency.

They rode up a long slope through greasewood and sage, following one of the ages-old trails, which led out over a pinnacle, giving them a fine view of the Moon River valley, although slightly hazy in the heat.

To the west, far down the valley they could see the green line of foliage which marked the course of Moon River. It swung in to the south of Crescent City, fading to a thin line where it entered San Gregario cañon.

Northward they could follow the course of the road, which led to the higher hills at the Silver Bell mine, where the deep cañons already showed purple in the haze. To the east stretched the broken hills of the Tin Cup and Box X ranches.

A bunch of range horses filed slowly out of the cañon to the north, stopped against the skyline and considered the two riders on the pinnacle. Evidently not caring for closer associations, they wheeled and disappeared over the ridge.

Skeeter Bill puffed slowly on his cigaret, his eyes half closed against the strong light.

"Must 'a' been quite a lot of noise around here when this country was in the makin', Kaintuck. Some of it got blowed up and some got blowed down."

"Uh-huh," said Kaintuck meditatively. "I've often wondered if this country was made on purpose."

"I reckon there was a reason, Kaintuck. But me and you ain't goin' to argue about it jist now. Let's move on."

They were within about a mile of the Box X, riding around the head of a brushy coulee, when Skeeter reined in his horse and squinted down across the hills.

"Whatcha see?" asked Kaintuck, reining in his horse.

"Couple of coyotes," said Skeeter.

He looped one leg around the horn of his saddle and began rolling a cigaret.

"Couple of coyotes?" queried Kaintuck. "My gosh, this sure is awful! Yuh don't reckon they'll bite us, do yuh, mister?"

"Yuh never can tell about a coyote," said Skeeter seriously, as he scratched a match on his chaps and lighted his cigaret.

"Do yuh reckon we better turn back?" grinned Kaintuck.

"No, we'll turn down. C'mon."

Skeeter rode straight down the side of the coulee, fairly sliding his horse through the thick brush. Kaintuck swore at Skeeter for being a fool, but followed him down.

About a hundred yards from where they had entered the coulee, Skeeter pulled up his horse and they dismounted.

"Them coyotes came out of the coulee just about here," said Skeeter. "Smell it, Kaintuck?"

"Somethin' has been dead," nodded Kaintuck, wrinkling his nose.

Skeeter circled back through the brush, while Kaintuck held the two horses. In a few minutes he heard Skeeter calling him.

"Tie them horses and come over here," called Skeeter.

Kaintuck had little trouble locating Skeeter, and he could see that Skeeter was deadly serious.

KAINTUCK shoved his way through the brush and stood beside Skeeter, who was looking down at the skeleton of a man. The coyotes had torn the bones apart, and there were only shreds of cloth to show that the body had once been clothed.

"That's what my hunch done for me," said Skeeter softly. "When I seen them two coyotes, I got a hunch to see what they had been feedin' on."

Kaintuck squatted on his heels and looked at the bones. It was the first time he had ever seen the skeleton of a man, and there was something fascinating about the grisly, grinning skull, which had once been the head of a man.

"Ain't a darned thing left to show who he was," stated Skeeter mournfully. "Mebbe some old prospector that died a natural death."

"Might be," said Kaintuck sadly. "He ain't been dead so awful long."

They rolled smokes and considered their find. A couple of magpies swooped up the swale, cackling angrily when they discovered that some human beings were interfering with their prospective meal.

"No, I don't reckon he's been dead so awful long," said Skeeter. "The coyotes and magpies would pick him pretty clean in a week. I dunno what we're goin' to do with him, Kaintuck. It's a cinch we can't carry him back on our horses, and we ain't got no right to bury him.

"Suppose we hang the bones up in a tree and come back later for 'em. The magpies will prob'ly get at 'em, but they can't hurt 'em much now."

"Wish I had gloves," complained Kaintuck, as Skeeter drew a pair from under his cartridge-belt.

"I'll hang 'em," smiled Skeeter.

He assembled the bones and was about to pick them up, when something attracted his eye. It had been lodged in the vertebre, and rolled loose when Skeeter moved the upper part of the skeleton.

Skeeter picked it up, looking it over closely.

"This feller didn't die of his own accord, Kaintuck. Here's the bullet that done the job, I reckon."

Together they examined the bit of metal, which was as perfect in shape as the day it came from the bullet mold, except for the markings of the lands, which had shaped its course through the revolver barrel.

"Looks like a .41," observed Skeeter. "Didja ever see a more perfect bullet, Kaintuck?"

"Never did. Probably didn't hit a bone, 'cause the nose of it ain't even dented. Must 'a' kinda got lodged in the spine and stayed there until now. But that don't mean nothin', Skeeter."

"Well, not much," admitted Skeeter. "Who shoots a .41?"

"I used to," said Kaintuck thoughtfully. "Never liked it. That was down in Texas. I dunno who uses one around here."

Skeeter put the bullet in his vest pocket and proceeded to place the bones in a stunted cottonwood. They searched the ground thoroughly, but were unable to find anything more.

"It's kinda funny where his clothes went to," said Skeeter, as they mounted their horses.

"Mebby he didn't have any on," suggested Kaintuck.

"Yeah, that might be true. By golly, you've got all the instincts of a detective."

They rode along for quite a while, both of them wondering who the unfortunate had been. As far as they knew there had not been any one reported missing.

"It's kinda hard luck," said Kaintuck slowly. "Nobody will ever know who he is —none of his friends, if he had any."

"That's right. Let's keep it dark for a while, Kaintuck. It can't hurt him none to hang there in a tree for a while. If somebody killed him, they'll shut up like a steel-trap if his skeleton is found. They're as safe as a church—now."

"All right," grudgingly.

Kaintuck liked to talk, and he had visions of much telling about their discovery.

They did not find Curley at the Box X, although there were evidences that he had been there recently. An old shed had been torn down to furnish boards for some repairs on the ranch-house; a stove had been installed in the kitchen, and a small stock of groceries adorned the shelves.

THE old Box X ranch-house faced the north, a weathered old wreck of a place, with little of its former beauty left as far as paint was concerned. The roof sagged in the middle, the shingles stood up in ungallant array, and the chimney looked like the top of the badly decayed tooth of some prehistoric creature.

The stable was almost roofless, its door swinging from one hinge. To the west of the house was a flat piece of ground, extending out about a hundred feet to the edge of a creek bank. Brush grew almost to the front porch on the north, and to the northeast was a deep washout filled with greasewood and wild rose bushes.

Skeeter and Kaintuck walked around, looking the place over, wondering how long it would take Curley Adams to make the old place habitable.

"Got a lot of work ahead of him," grinned Kaintuck. "But I'm bettin' that Curley will get a lot of fun out of it."

"He's got the right idea, anyway," said Skeeter. "Let's go over to the Gregory ranch. I'd kinda like to get a look at that girl."

"She's prob'ly engaged," warned Kaintuck seriously.

" 'Sall right with me," laughed Skeeter. "I'm a detective—not a Romeo. And, anyway, a sheriff ought to get acquainted with the folks."

"I thought yuh was goin' to say 'friend'," said Kaintuck. "I've heard that Gregory trailed along with Monk Clark, tryin' to beat yuh for office."

"Tha'sall right, Kaintuck. I prob'ly wouldn't 'a' voted for Gregory if he'd been runnin' for sheriff. But that's no reason why I should keep away from him."

"I s'pose that's a pious way of lookin' at it, Skeeter. Forgive yore enemies, but don't forget 'em. An old preacher down in Texas explained all that to me—about forgivin' my enemies. I told him that his argument was one-sided, 'cause the enemies might not know it.

"He told me all about turnin' the other cheek, when somebody slapped yuh, and I asked him how many times he'd been slapped. It jist don't work out, Skeeter Bill."

"Lotsa things don't, Kaintuck. The idea is fine. If yuh happen to hate somebody, it ain't so hard to kinda forgive 'em. Yuh can do it. Life is too short to go around with yore heart full of hate agin' anybody."

"Shore," nodded Kaintuck. "Yeah, that's fine. But suppose somebody hates you? That makes 'em an enemy, don't it? And all the forgivin' yuh can boil up in yore system ain't goin' to stop 'em from bustin' yuh one, if they get a good chance."

Skeeter grinned at the bobbing ears of his horse and shook his head slowly.

"I can't argue agin' that, Kaintuck. Mebbe a preacher could show yuh how it works out—I can't."

"Yeah! Jist like a jigger down in Texas. He showed me a non-refillable whisky bottle. It shore looked great. He was goin' to make a million dollars on it. I never did see a feller as happy as he was—until I asked him how in —— he was goin' to get the whisky into it in the first place.

"When it comes to religion, I ain't got a leg to stand on in an argument—not a leg. But when it comes to whisky bottles, I shore am conversant with the subject, from the distillery to the delirium tremens."

They rode to the Gregory ranch, but found only Calamity at home. He masticated violently, squinted at Skeeter's badge, and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Yo're the new sheriff, eh? Name's Sarg, ain't it? I'm Calamity. Rode the range before yuh could even find bob-wire in a dictionary. Yessir, I can remember when Sittin' Bull was a calf. They had reg'lar sheriffs in them days, by ginger!"

"I've heard that you was an old-timer," smiled Skeeter.

"Old-timer! My ——, I sh'd say so."

"Where's Gregory?" asked Skeeter.

"Gregory? Oh, yeah. Ex-cuse me. Yuh see, everybody calls him Hank, and yuh kinda had me confused f'r a minute. Gregory—yeah. Well, I dunno where he is. Said he was goin' to town."

"Prob'ly that's where he went," said Kaintuck dryly.

"His daughter came back a few days ago, didn't she?"—thus Skeeter, trying to act indifferently.

Calamity opened his mouth widely, closed it slowly and spat audibly.

"Oh, that's the Gregory yuh wanted to see, eh? Huh! Well," Calamity turned his head and looked toward the hills. "She piled on to a jug-headed roan a while ago and said she was goin' to find out if they'd moved any of the hills since she went away. —— only knows where she is now."

They did not stay long at the HG ranch. Calamity wanted them to listen to him tell about how the early day sheriffs handled bad men, but neither of them cared to hear it.

Back in Crescent City, they stabled their horses and sat down in their office. Skeeter took the bullet from his pocket and looked it over. Outside of the scorings on it, there was nothing to show that it had ever been fired. The rim of the blunt point was as clear cut as it could be made.

"I wish that darn thing could talk," said Kaintuck.

He had opened his tobacco and book of papers, preparatory to making another attempt at one-handed rolling.

Skeeter had taken out his knife and was testing the quality of the bullet. It did not cut like lead.

"Kaintuck," he said softly, "this bullet is silver!"

"No!" Kaintuck swept his papers aside and leaned across the table. "How do yuh know, Skeeter?"

"Look at it. Try to cut the edge of it. You never seen any lead as hard as that. If it ain't silver—what is it?"

Kaintuck examined it closely, tested it. He took a dollar from his pocket and whittled at the milled edge.

"They cut about the same, Skeeter. But why in —— would any one mold a silver bullet to shoot a man with?"

Skeeter shook his head and took the bullet.

"I dunno. I can *sabe* why a man would counterfeit a dollar, but I'll be darned if I know why he'd counterfeit a bullet—in silver."

"Find the man who shoots silver bullets," grinned Kaintuck.

"Yeah—find him. But for gosh sake, don't mention this to a single soul, Kaintuck."

"Why not?" Blankly.

"My gosh, if yuh do we'll never find out. Listen, Kaintuck; if the man who fired that shot knew we was lookin' for the man who shot a silver bullet, wouldn't he cover his tracks so danged deep that we'd never find out?"

"I s'pose," dubiously. "But how in —— are yuh goin' to find out anythin' if yuh don't ask questions? We've got a skeleton in a tree and a silver bullet in yore pocket, but we don't dare to mention it. This is a —— of a job!"

"It sure is a fine job," grinned Skeeter.

"You'll tell Moran, won't yuh, Skeeter?"

"Tell nobody. These are our clues, Kaintuck. Let Moran find some for himself—if he can. Where would a man get silver to mould into bullets?"

"Silver Bell mine, or they might melt a dollar."

"Uh-huh," Skeeter grew thoughtful. "And the Silver Bell ain't in the habit of givin' away silver, I don't suppose."

"A feller could buy some, couldn't he?"

"Yeah, I suppose he could. Anyway, in the mornin' me and you are goin' to the Silver Bell mine, Kaintuck."

"All right. We've had so much in our mind today that we've plumb forgot to eat. I could fold m'self plumb around some ham and aigs and feel like a medder-lark."

Skeeter shoved the mysterious bullet deep down in his pocket and they headed for a restaurant.

"I think we're gettin' along good," said Skeeter. "For once in our lives we're usin' our brains."

IT WAS shortly after Skeeter and Kaintuck had left the Gregory ranch that Monk Clark rode up to the ranch-house and dismounted.

Calamity had watched him from a front window, a quizzical expression on his seamed face, as he noted that Clark was "all dressed up." It was seldom that Clark dressed up; so seldom that Calamity could not remember the time.

Calamity went out on the porch and squinted at Clark, who was self-conscious of his appearance. A spotless, white bosom, which bulged badly, a high collar, red four-in-hand tie, and an old cutaway coat covered the upper half of his body. From his waist downward, he remained as usual.

"Did somebody die?" queried Calamity in awe-struck tones.

"What do yuh mean?" growled Clark.

"All duded up thataway. Yuh ought to use glue on that shirt. It kinda gaps open and shows yore red undershirt, Monk. And jist one more thing; yuh better git a lower collar or move yore ears up another notch or two, 'cause yo're sure sawin' 'em off close to yore head."

"My looks are none of yore —— business!" snapped Monk.

"I s'pose not. I remember a dude, back in 1866. He—"

"I don't care a —— what you remember! Where's Gregory?"

"I dunno. Said he was goin' to town."

Monk moved past Calamity and peered into the living-room.

"No, she ain't here either," said Calamity. "I shore appreciate havin' yuh dress up thataway to come over to see me, but it don't impress me a —— of a lot. Back in 1866—"

"Aw-w-w-w, stop it!" exploded Monk. "Calamity, I wonder how you ever lived as long as you have."

"I ain't never met my match," said Calamity seriously.

"Mm-m-m-yah! I suppose that's true," Monk sat down in a rocking-chair and his bosom immediately bulged beyond his chin.

Calamity chuckled hoarsely and went in to the house. He knew that Monk's patience was stretched to the breaking point. While many of the others felt that Clark was a man who must be treated with great respect, Calamity did not.

In fact, he hated Monk Clark. Not such a strange thing, at that, because Calamity hated nearly everybody. And he was not afraid of anybody. It was not often that Calamity was amused sufficiently to chuckle, but he was now. To think of Monk Clark coming to see Joy Gregory almost made Calamity laugh.

But it was no laughing matter with Monk Clark. He planted his feet against the railing and swore to himself. At times Calamity peered out to see if Monk was still there—and he was. At least Monk was no quitter.

It was late in the afternoon when Hank Gregory camé home and found Monk on the porch. Calamity came out, after Monk and Hank had exchanged greetings. Hank noticed Monk's attire, but said nothing.

"Where's Joy?" asked Gregory.

"I dunno," said Calamity. "She rode away jist a short time after you left, Hank."

"Rode away? Where was she goin'?"

"I never asked her."

"Huh! No, I don't suppose yuh did. Go alone?"

"Nope."

"Didn't, eh? Who was she with?"

"Cowpuncher."

"Who?"

"Curley Adams."

Monk glared at Calamity. He had been sitting on that porch for hours waiting for her to come home. Calamity actually chuckled and went back in the house. The chuckle grated on the soul of Monk Clark.

"—— curly-headed cowpuncher!" he muttered.

"Who—Calamity?"

"Calamity, ——!"

For several minutes there was only silence. Then Monk Clark cleared his throat harshly and leaned closer to Gregory.

"Hank, are you goin' to let yore daughter marry Adams?"

"Am I goin' to let her?" Gregory laughed shortly. "Joy is of age, Monk."

"Of age, eh?"

"Yeah—couple of years past."

"Means that you ain't got nothin' to say about who she marries, eh?"

"Just about that, Monk. Curley is all right, I guess. Just bought the old Box X ranch, I heard."

Monk snorted with disgust.

"Old Box X! What in —— does that amount to?"

"I dunno, Monk. Anyway, it's their business. Say, what interest have you got in this matter?"

"Well," slowly, "I'm free, white and twenty-one."

"You—uh—say, Monk, you—" Gregory checked a laugh. "Monk, you wasn't figurin' on marryin' Joy, was yuh?"

"What in —— is so funny about that?"

"Oh, I see."

"I could give her more than a forty-a-month puncher could."

"I suppose yuh could—mebbe."

"Why the 'mebbe'?"

"I reckon she loves Adams, Monk."

"And yuh think she'll marry him?"

"I kinda look for it."

"And starve to death with him on the Box X."

"No-o-o-o, I wouldn't say that, Monk. Yuh see, there ain't nobody ever starved to death in Moon River Valley."

"All right," Monk got to his feet and hitched up his belt. "I reckon I'll be goin'."

He went down to his horse just as Curley and Joy rode in through the gate.

They continued on up to the porch and dismounted. Curley suppressed a grin with difficulty. It was the first time he had ever seen Monk Clark dressed like that.

"How do you do, Mr. Clark?" said Joy pleasantly.

"Howdy," grunted Clark. "Well, I'll be goin'."

Calamity had appeared on the porch again.

"Don't hurry away," said Joy. "Won't you sit down a while?"

Calamity chuckled again, and Clark swung into his saddle.

"Thank yuh," he said ungraciously. "I've set long enough."

"Back in 1866, I knowed about a hen that set for two months on a basket of Chiny aigs—" began Calamity seriously.

Clark swung his horse around and galloped toward the gate. Down in his heart was a desire to kill Calamity. Joy's burst of laughter floated to his ears, and he felt that she knew he had made a fool of himself.

"Go ahead and laugh," he muttered. "I sure made a —— fool of myself."

BACK in the hills he stopped long enough to divest himself of the white shirt, collar and tie, which he threw away. Then he knotted a black muffler around his neck and rode on.

At first Clark was in a rage against Calamity. If Calamity had told him that Joy was riding with Curley Adams, it would have been all right, but to keep him sitting out on that porch for hours, dressed up—that was the rub.

And he knew that Joy had laughed at him. A laugh hurt Monk Clark more than a blow—a laugh from a girl. He wondered bitterly if they were all laughing at him now. It was the first time he had ever dressed up to visit a girl—and the last.

He rode past the Box X, but drew rein long enough to look at the place. The setting sun threw long shadows from the old buildings. There was such an air of utter desolation about the place, like the ruins of some ancient dwelling, that Monk Clark shook his big head as he remembered that Curley Adams intended to marry Joy Gregory and bring her there to live.

He rode on, reaching the Tin Cup ranch just at dark. The well lighted ranch-house, nestled in a group of huge sycamores and cottonwoods, the wide veranda, the huge red stable looming up against the hills, the well kept fences, all spoke of prosperity, good management—a fit home for any daughter of the ranges. Yet she chose the Box X.

He stabled his horse and walked to the house. The boys were eating supper in the long dining-room, and he halted near the door long enough to hear his name mentioned.

"I tell yuh he went courtin'," insisted one of the boys. "I seen him. He had on a boiled shirt and a red tie. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Had on his funeral coat, too. I'll make yuh a little bet that he went to see Joy Gregory."

He did not wait to hear more, but went to his room, where he changed shirts, took a stiff drink of liquor and sat down to think it over; to think what a fool he had been.

Some of the boys found his horse in the stable and notified Wong, the cook, who hurried up to Clark's room, and timidly knocked on the door.

"Come in!" snapped Clark.

Wong opened the door and bobbed his head.

"Yo' like some sluppah, Misser Clark?"

"No!" roared Clark. "Get to —— out of here!"

Wong shut the door softly and padded back to the kitchen, shaking his head slowly.

"Too much love one time—no good," he decided.

IT WAS the following day that a heavy wagon came creaking down over the grades from the Silver Bell mine. The rear wheels were locked, the team was holding back as much as possible, but even at that there were times when the wagon threatened to run over the team.

On the one seat sat the driver, a stolid-faced, round-headed sort of person, who regularly hauled supplies from Crescent City to the Silver Bell mine, and with him sat the two well dressed men who had inquired of Skeeter Bill about the stage to the mines.

There was little chance for conversation among the three, as it required all their efforts to cling to the jerking, bouncing seat. While the driver braced heavily against the brake with his foot and held tightly to the lines, he was able to maintain an equilibrium of sorts, but the two passengers had nothing except the wagon-box and the seat to keep them from being flung off the equipage.

Lurching and jerking, the rear wheels almost skidding off the narrow grade, they swung around a sharp curve on to a piece of comparatively level road.

The two passengers relaxed slightly, with sighs of relief, but jerked back to attention when two masked men dropped off the upper side of the road and leveled rifles at them.

"Whoa!" The driver threw his weight on the brake so suddenly that his passengers almost left the seat.

The two masked men came forward, still covering the driver and passengers.

"Git down," ordered one of the masked men.

The passengers were so cramped from their ride and frightened that they were hardly able to climb down over the wheel. One of them slipped and almost fell off the grade, and a masked man chuckled with amusement.

"Go back past the wagon, all three of yuh," ordered the spokesman.

Wonderingly they filed to the rear, herded by one of the holdup men, while the other climbed to the driver's seat, kicked the brake loose and drove away.

They could hear the wagon rattling along the rocky grades, the sound growing more faint until it died away in the distance. For possibly ten minutes more the masked man kept them covered. Then he motioned down the road.

"I reckon I can git along without you fellers," he said.

"We can go now?" asked the driver wonderingly.

"I don't care a —— what yuh do now." The masked man backed around the curve and disappeared.

For a space of time the three men grouped together on the grade, hardly knowing just what to do.

"That was a crazy thing to do," declared the driver. "Who in —— ever heard of anybody holdin' up a tote-wagon?"

The two passengers looked at each other helplessly.

"And stealin' a few hundred pounds of lead," continued the driver.

"A few hundred pounds of lead," echoed one of the men. "You fool, that wasn't lead—it was silver!"

"The —— it was! Why Sam Rugg said—"

"No matter what Sam Rugg said!" snapped the other. "There was approximately a thousand pounds of silver bullion in that wagon."

"Geeminy gosh! Why did he ever send it—"

The driver took off his hat and mopped his brow. He had wondered why Sam Rugg, superintendent of the Silver Bell, had loaded his wagon with lead bars.

Some one had told him that these two strangers were Belden and Stanfield, owners of the Silver Bell, and he had heard hints that they had come to see why the silver production had fallen so heavily in a year.

There had also been rumors of high-grading—ore stealing—at the Silver Bell, although none of the workmen seemed to know whether there was any truth in the matter or not. But this matter of a thousand pounds of silver was almost beyond the imagination of the driver.

"And it was our own suggestion," said Frank Belden disconsolately. "It seemed

the safe thing to do. There has been a leak somewhere, Ed."

"And rather a heavy leak, it seems," nodded Stanfield. "No doubt the high-graders have accomplices at the mine." He shrugged his heavy shoulders. "I suppose we may as well start walking."

"Might as well," agreed the driver. "It's a —— of a long walk to Crescent City, but it's mostly all downhill."

They started down the grades without further comment. Far below them stretched the Moon River Valley, hazy in the morning sun.

"That's a pretty big steal of silver," said Stanfield. "I don't see how they can ever use it, Frank. A thousand pounds of silver won't be an easy thing to dispose of—especially with some one watching for it."

"I've been wondering about that part of it," replied Belden. "They'll have to carry it in the wagon, and it might not be hard to trace that outfit."

"Might as well save your breath," advised the driver. "It's a long walk to town, and that sun is sure goin' to be hot."

AND while the three men drifted along the grades, Skeeter Bill Sarg and Kaintuck Kennedy were coming up the lower grades out of the valley, heading for the Silver Bell.

Because of the steep road they traveled slowly, stopping at times to give their horses a chance to rest, while they scanned the country. Neither of them had ever been at the Silver Bell mine.

"I never could see why they don't discover mines close to town," complained Kaintuck. "They'd save a lot on the haulin'."

"Yuh ought to take it up with 'em," grinned Skeeter. "Mebbe they never thought of it."

"I s'pose not. Any danged fool that'll dig for a livin' ain't got much sense. I might git a patent on it, Skeeter."

They laughed and rode on up the grades. About a mile farther on they stopped again. Just beyond them, the road circled the head of a deep cañon, swinging back along the cañon rim opposite them. It was about two hundred yards on an air-line across the cañon to the opposite grade, at a point where the road disappeared around another right-hand curve.

And just at this curve stood a team and wagon, where two or three men were working frantically to unload something.

Skeeter and Kaintuck watched them for several moments.

"Whatcha s'pose they're tryin' to do, Skeeter?" queried Kaintuck.

"I dunno. Mebbe they broke down and have to unload."

It was too far for Skeeter and Kaintuck to recognize any of the men. The heavy growth of jack-pines and underbrush grew up against the lower side of the grade, and it seemed as if these men were unloading into this brush.

One of the men sprang from the rear of the wagon into the brush, while another climbed down over the right front wheel, leaving one man in the wagon. These two seemed to be arguing over something.

Another man clambered from the brush at the lower side of the grade and joined the one at the front wheel.

"Four men," muttered Skeeter.

As if in answer to his statement, one of the men looked across the cañon and saw them.

His discovery seemed to electrify the other three. They ran around the rear of the wagon, while the fourth man climbed over the opposite side of the wagon-box.

"What in —— do you reckon that means?" asked Kaintuck.

"Trouble!" snapped Skeeter.

He had seen a man appear over the top of the wagon, holding a rifle.

They whirled their horses around and spurred them into a run down the grade, heading for a protecting curve, while the rocks beside them splattered lead. The curve was within twenty feet of the two riders, when Kaintuck's horse lurched sideways, went down on one shoulder, flinging Kaintuck over the edge of the grade and turning a complete somersault.

Skeeter's horse barely made the turn, its hind feet throwing rocks off the grade, as Skeeter whirled it back against the upper side and fell out of the saddle.

Drawing his gun, he ran back to the curve, calling Kennedy's name. The horse was dead, its body half off the grade, blocked against a pine snag. But Kaintuck did not answer. Skeeter slid along the bank, trying to get another view of the men at the wagon.

A bullet smashed against the rocks near

his head, apprizing him of the fact that the men were still anxious to kill him. Skeeter squinted ruefully at his six-shooter. It was about three hundred yards from there to the wagon.

"I've gotta lot of chance against rifles," he grunted, shoving the gun back in his holster.

Another bullet struck the ground near the dead horse, and showered him with gravel. He withdrew around the curve, while two more bullets whined past him.

"Them fellers are sure enterprising," he announced to himself. "Kaintuck! Hey! Kaintuck!"

But Kaintuck did not answer.

"Went and got himself killed," mourned Skeeter. "Well, I've got to find him, I reckon. I wish I knowed why they're shootin' at me, and what they're doin' with that wagon."

Keeping the point of rock at the curve between himself and the wagon, he slipped off the grade and began working back toward the spot where Kaintuck had gone over.

He could not see the team now, and had no idea what the four men were doing. In fact, they were of less interest to him than Kaintuck was just now. He slipped and slid along the side of the hill around the curve, clinging to the jack-pines.

Then he heard a welcome sound—Kaintuck swearing. At least, thought Skeeter, he is not dead yet.

"Where are yuh, Kaintuck?" asked Skeeter cautiously.

"Gee-o-graphically speakin', I dunno where in —— I am," replied Kaintuck disgustedly. "Part of me is on the ground and part of me is in a —— tree."

"Which end is in the tree?"

"South. —— it, I've got my ankle hung up in the crotch of a snag, and I can't hump high enough to get loose."

"Why don'tcha slip yore foot out of the boot?"

"Think yo're smart, don'tcha? C'mon down and show me how yuh think I ought to do it."

Skeeter slid down to him and managed to extricate the boot. Kaintuck slumped down on the ground and grinned painfully. His face was scratched, his shirt badly torn, and one leg of his overalls had been ripped open from thigh to knee.

"Yuh didn't get hurt none, didja?" asked Skeeter anxiously.

"Didn't I? Huh! Horse dead?"

"Yeah. Turned over once and quit cold. My gosh, you sure turned a hooligan, Kaintuck."

"Didn't I?" Kaintuck laughed convulsively and squinted back toward the grade. "I jist sailed down here, all spraddled out like a flyin' squirrel, hooked one foot in the top of that snag and went 'round and 'round, like a—say, what became of them jiggers that was shootin' at us?"

"Still there, I reckon—" dryly. "I went back to take a look, and they shot at me some more. If yuh feel like goin' back to the road, we'll take another look at 'em."

Kaintuck shook his head, rubbing his knee with both hands.

"Nawsir. Them danged fools ain't got no better sense than to shoot right at yuh, and they've got rifles. Say, I shore put a lot of strain on this one leg. I'll betcha she's a foot longer than the other one."

"Can yuh walk on it, Kaintuck?"

Kaintuck got to his feet, grimacing with pain.

"Don't think I can make it, Skeeter. Mebbe it'll ease up a little if I set down a while. First time I ever played pop-the-whip with my leg, and I sure took all the kinks out. F'r instance, I used to have a bulge, which was knowed as a knee, but I yanked it all out."

"Prob'ly be a cripple for life," nodded Skeeter. "Let a thing like that rest too long and yuh never can get it unhooked. Yuh never can tell about it, Kaintuck. Yore knee might bend the other way, like a stork's does."

"Git me a bill and spear frogs," nodded Kaintuck, flexing his knee. "That doohickey that keeps it from bendin' the wrong way is all right; so I reckon I'm all right. Let's try and git back to the road."

With much swearing, Kaintuck managed to pull himself up the hill, favoring his left leg as much as possible. They worked around the point and reached the road near Skeeter's horse.

As they stood on the road, debating their next move, they heard the rattle of a wagon coming down the hill.

They exchanged a swift glance and moved in against the rocky bank, drawing their guns.

"Got a lot of nerve," gritted Skeeter. "Good-luck, Kaintuck."

"Same to you," said Kaintuck evenly, his

six-shooter balanced in his right hand. "They'll pay for that horse."

THE rattle and crunch of the wagon came closer and closer. They could hear some one talking, the jingle of harness. Then the horses swung almost in to them, shied toward the outer edge, and were jerked to a stop.

Skeeter and Kaintuck stepped out, covering the three men on the seat. It was Belden, Stanfield and the driver. Their six arms went upward in unision.

"For ——'s sake!" snorted Belden. "Again?"

Skeeter went closer, looking them over carefully.

"Yuh might talk a little," said Skeeter.

"We might talk a whole lot," said the driver.

"If we get tired of listenin' we'll tell yuh when to stop," said Skeeter. "It might interest yuh to know that one of yore shots killed my deputy's horse."

"One of our shots?" gasped Belden.

"The shots we heard," said Stanfield. "I'll bet—"

"We're not gamblin'," said Skeeter. "Do some talkin'."

Stanfield had been leaning forward, squinting at the insignia of the sheriff's office on Skeeter's shirt.

"Are you the sheriff?" he asked.

"Yeah. And I've got a gun in my hand and a finger on the trigger, and I hadn't ought to miss yuh at this distance."

"These are the two men who asked us about the Silver Bell stage," said Kaintuck.

"I know it," nodded Skeeter.

"My name is Stanfield, and my companion's name is Belden. We own the Silver Bell mine. This other man does freighting for the mine."

"Tha's all right with me," said Skeeter. "But that ain't no reason for yuh to shoot at us."

"We never did!" blurted the driver. "We ain't even got a gun."

"Let me tell him about it," said Belden. "Several miles up the grades, we were held up by two masked men who took our team and wagon. One man held us there until the other had driven away.

"There was nothing for us to do except to start walking down in to the valley. That was quite a while ago. We must have walked five miles, at least. We heard the echo of some shots, and wondered what it meant.

"Just back there a little ways we found our team and wagon in the middle of the road. There wasn't a soul around; so we climbed in and came on. That's our story."

"Sounds pretty good," nodded Skeeter. "The holdup part sounds kinda funny though. What did they take, except the team and wagon?"

"A thousand pounds of silver bullion."

"A—a—take down yore hands, gents."

The three pairs of hands came down and three men sighed with relief.

"Half-a-ton of silver!" blurted Kaintuck. "Gee-e-e mighty!"

"And they unloaded it over there," said Skeeter. "No wonder they didn't want us to come along. Of all the danged nerve in the world!"

He squinted off across the hills and rubbed his nose with the back of his hand.

"You can stop them, can't you?" asked Belden nervously. "They haven't had time to get far away."

"And I'd get stopped," said Skeeter seriously. "There's four men in the gang—four that we seen. It means that they had some pack horses ready for the stuff. One or two men will act as a rear guard for that stuff, and—" Skeeter shook his head slowly. "Nope, it would be suicide."

"But you are the sheriff," said Belden. "It is your duty—"

"Tha'sso? There ain't nothin' in my oath of office that says I'm supposed to get killed. Yuh might read about a sheriff that shoved his beak in to danger on purpose, but when yuh do yuh can just bet it ain't old man Sarg's high-pocket kid."

Skeeter turned to Kaintuck, who was grinning softly.

"Kaintuck, I reckon yo're elected to rest a while. Set down in the brush and practise rollin' 'em one-handed, while I go back to Crescent City, get yuh a live horse and a couple of rifles. Be back as quick as I can."

He walked to his horse, mounted almost on the run and was out of sight so fast that no one had a chance to offer any suggestions.

"That's jist like him," grinned Kaintuck.

"But—but the thieves will be miles away before he can return," protested Belden. "Is he afraid to—"

"Yuh can take that out and burn it,"

interrupted Kaintuck. "Skeeter Bill ain't afraid, but he's no —— fool. My horse is dead, and them jiggers have rifles. We've got to have an even break, pardner."

There was no argument left, as far as Kaintuck was concerned; so the driver kicked the brake loose and the equipage proceeded on down the grade, while Kaintuck limped to his dead horse and removed saddle and bridle.

Then he sat down in the shade and wasted much tobacco and cigaret papers. His strained leg gave him a little trouble, but Kaintuck was an optimist, as far as injuries were concerned. He knew it was about eight miles to Crescent City, and that Skeeter Bill would be back as soon as possible; so he made himself comfortable.

Skeeter Bill did not make his return to town at all conspicuous. He rode in at the rear of his office, walked to the livery-stable, where he secured a horse, and came back to his office. It did not take him long to procure two rifles, two belts of ammunition and some extra shells for their six-shooters.

Leaving at the rear of his office he rode quietly out of town, swung back to the road and headed for the grades at top speed. He met the three men with the wagon, but did not stop to talk.

Kaintuck was still wasting tobacco when Skeeter rode up, but pocketed the rest of the sack and proceeded to saddle the horse.

"Anythin' new?" asked Skeeter.

"Yeah."

"What?"

"I find out that some cigaret papers are tougher than others. Yuh shore made good time, Skeeter. Meet the wagon?"

"Uh-huh."

Kaintuck belted on his rifle cartridges, stuffed the loading-gate full of 30-30's, levered one in to the chamber, and announced himself ready.

THEY rode back to the spot where the wagon had been unloaded, dismounted and led their horses off the edge of the grade. There was plenty of evidence that the unloading had been done at that spot. The brush had been trampled down and there was an abundance of horse tracks a little further down the hill, where a heavy growth of jack-pines had masked them from the road.

"All unshod horses," said Skeeter, after examining the spot where the packing had been done.

They picked up several empty cartridge shells from the grade, and found them all to be 30-30 caliber.

"We'll just have to follow 'em down the hill," said Skeeter. "They'll all stick together and mebbe we can trail 'em."

There was an old game trail leading toward the bottom of the cañon, starting almost from the spot where the packing had been done, but there were no horse-tracks on it. In fact, it showed no tracks of any kind.

"They've got to get out of this cañon," declared Skeeter. "We'll take the old trail and take a chance on cuttin' their tracks further down."

"Mebby," nodded Kaintuck. "They prob'ly had reasons for not takin' the trail."

Skeeter started down the trail, leading his horse, but had only gone a few feet when he stopped. In the middle of the trail was the imprint of a man's boot sole, clearly etched in a film of dust.

It was the print of a right boot. Skeeter squatted down and studied it, while Kaintuck moved in close and looked it over.

"That feller sure left his imprint," said Skeeter. "He runs his heels over on the outer edge, Kaintuck."

"How do yuh know, Skeeter?"

" 'Cause it shows that he does. Prob'ly run 'em over bad. See that line through the heel mark? He didn't want to take 'em to a shoemaker and have a new heel put on; so he squared up that heel on the outer edge, fitted in a piece of sole-leather and filled her plumb full of nails. And to make it last a while, he took a big nail, cut it short and nailed it close to the edge. Yuh can see the head of the nail."

"Yeah, that shore is it," agreed Kaintuck. "But how can yuh tell it wasn't done by a shoemaker?"

" 'Cause it's a bad fittin' patch. And a shoemaker would 'a' put on one of them iron jiggers, shaped like a half-moon instead of a ten-penny nail."

Skeeter grinned widely at his own acumen and led the way down the trail. There were no more tracks in the trail. They reached the bottom of the cañon and began their search for horse-tracks.

The game-trail passed through an open swale at the bottom of the cañon, but as

far as they could discover no horses had passed through the swale.

"Well, they couldn't cross below nor above here," complained Kaintuck. "The brush is so danged thick yuh can't even see through it."

Skeeter climbed up on the side of the cañon, searching for another opening where the pack train might have crossed, but as far as he could see there was no place. He mounted his horse and rode back over the game-trail to the grade, where he dismounted and searched for the spot where the horses had gone down the hill.

The ground was fairly hard, but the prints were plain enough where the loading had been done. For several minutes Skeeter puzzled over the problem. The game-trail was the one way down, and it did not seem reasonable that the thieves would slow their getaway by traveling over down-timber and brush. The old trail had been packed so hard that Skeeter's shod horse only showed the calk marks, except at the upper end of the trail where a minature slide had left a dirt patch large enough to show the imprint of the patched-heel boot.

Anyway, he could find no tracks away from where the horses had milled around during the packing up of the silver.

"Must 'a' had wings," he told himself.

An idea suddenly came to him, and he went back to the trail, where he examined it closely. A grin flashed across his lips and he mounted hurriedly, riding as swiftly as possible back to Kaintuck, who was still searching near the open swale.

"Git yore horse," called Skeeter. "These jiggers muffled their horse's hoofs. No wonder there ain't a mark of any kind."

Kaintuck mounted and they spurred down the narrow trail. Not a hundred yards further along the trail they found where a horse had slipped a chunk off the trail, leaving the fresh dirt exposed.

"I thought of that, while you was up the hill," said Kaintuck wisely.

"That's why yuh spent all yore time lookin' somewhere else, I suppose," laughed Skeeter.

"Well, anyway, we'll be in a —— of a fix as soon as we run out of trail," said Kaintuck. "They won't foller this old deer-trail forever."

"I thought of that quite a while ago," said Skeeter.

They followed the old trail to a point where it disappeared, and there they lost all chance of picking up the horse-tracks. The ground was hard, and the muffled hoofs made no marks. There was nothing for them to do, except to follow the slope down in to the valley, trusting to luck to pick up the tracks again.

But luck was not with them. After hours of hard riding, circling back and forth across the hills, they reached the banks of Moon River, which they followed back to Crescent City. It was after dark when they stabled their horses and went out to eat.

THEY found Frank Moran in the restaurant, and after they finished their meal Moran went to the office with them and Skeeter told him the story of the silver robbery.

"I heard it talked about," said Moran. "These two men who own the mine told all about it when they got back. I guess every one around here has heard about it."

Skeeter stretched his legs and puffed on his cigaret.

"It kinda looks to me like the counterfeiters had picked enough stuff to keep 'em moldin' dollars for a long time," he observed. "It ain't nothin' that I'd hang a man for, but dang 'em, they killed Kaintuck's horse and darned near got Kaintuck. I can't forgive 'em for doin' that."

"It shows that they're desperate men," said Moran.

"Yeah, I s'pose they are. Slick, too. They muffled their pack-animals' hoofs."

"Is that so?" Moran grew interested. "Couldn't you find a track?"

"Not a horse-track, except where they packed up. They shoot 30-30 rifles, and they shoot straight."

"Yo're danged right they do," agreed Kaintuck, flexing his sore leg. "I'm goin' to declare open season on counterfeiters right now."

"You heard anythin' new?" asked Skeeter.

Moran shook his head.

"Got any more letters from Shorty Long?"

"No. Kinda expected to hear from him today, but no mail came. I'm danged if I can find out anythin'."

"It looks to me," said Skeeter slowly, "as though somebody at the mine is workin' with 'em—somebody who put 'em wise to the shipment of this silver. Do you know the superintendent, Sam Rugg?"

"I've seen him," said Moran. "He's a big, hard-faced sort of a jigger, with a black mustache."

"Uh-huh," Skeeter squinted at his boots for several moments. Then—

"Moran, have you accomplished anythin' since you've been workin' on this case?"

"Just what do yuh mean, Sheriff?"

"What I said. You've been punchin' cows and workin' at the different ranches; but have yuh done anythin'? Have yuh even got a suspicion of where this money is bein' made?"

Moran was inclined to get a trifle peevish at Skeeter's tone, but thought better of it and was forced to admit that he had accomplished nothing.

"It isn't a thing yuh can come right out and show your flag," said Moran. "You know how long I'd last if it was known that I was a detective."

Skeeter nodded thoughtfully.

"Yeah, I guess that's right."

"You can see how hard it is to get a clue," said Moran.

"Well, I dunno. I've got several, Moran."

"You have?" This was interesting.

Skeeter nodded and began manufacturing a cigaret.

"Mind tellin' me what they are?" queried Moran.

"I'm goin' to tell you the same thing I told Kaintuck; to go out and get some for yourself."

Skeeter grinned widely at Moran, who was at a loss just what to say.

"And I ain't got me none yet," complained Kaintuck. "It kinda looks like when they parceled out the brains I was out fishin'. Skeeter is real smart."

Moran laughed shortly.

"That ain't hardly fair, Sheriff. This case is mine, and I don't like the idea of a sheriff getting a clue and keepin' it from me."

"Tha'sso?" Skeeter grinned at the ceiling. "Yo're like that picture of the kid in a bathtub, reachin' for a slippery bar of soap. Won't be happy till he gits it. Well, I've got my bar of soap, Moran.

"I dunno much about the manufacture of bad money, but I do *sabe* holdup stuff. These jiggers are awful smart. At first I had an idea they was smarter than me, but they ain't. Nawsir, I'm jist as smart as they are."

"Well, that's good—" thus Moran, just a little peevish— "I wish you'd tell me what you've stumbled on to, but if you won't, you won't. I'm willin' to put my cards on the table, face up."

"You ain't got any cards," grinned Skeeter. "If I didn't hold more cards in this game than you do, I'd call for a new deck. Aw, yuh don't need to get sore, Moran. I'm no detective, but I've got somethin' to work on—and that's more than you've got."

"Anythin' is more than I've got," Moran grinned and got to his feet. "If it gets to be more than you can handle, let me in on it. Uncle Sam is dependin' on me to clear up this case, and I hate to fall down completely, yuh know."

"All right," promised Skeeter. "Mebbe a little later I'll tell yuh what I know. But I want to be sure first."

They shook hands and Moran went away. Kaintuck squinted at Skeeter and shook his head.

"You shore bragged about yourself a lot, cowboy. I dunno what got into yuh."

Skeeter laughed at Kaintuck.

"Mebbe I threw a scare into him, Kaintuck. He'd hate like —— for a ordinary sheriff to clear up a case that he couldn't handle."

"You kinda usin' a spur on him, eh?"

"Yuh might say I am. I was scared you might mention that boot-track in the trail, Kaintuck. Let him find his own clues. He'd prob'ly go around the country, killin' folks jist for a chance to look at the bottom of their heels."

"Aw, ——, he wouldn't do a thing like that, Skeeter."

"Yuh never can tell what a detective like him might do."

IT WAS the following day that Monk Clark came back to the Gregory ranch; but this time he did not wear his Sunday garments, nor did he go to the ranch-house. Hank Gregory was at the stable when Clark rode up, and Calamity was helping Joy plant some roses in the front yard—much to Calamity's disgust.

"What do you know about roses?" asked Joy, straightening up from a bush and pushing her hair back from her eyes.

Her hand was dirty and it left a streak on her nose.

"What do I know," grinned Calamity,

"about roses? Lemme tell yuh about some roses I set out in—"

"1866," finished Joy quizzically.

"A tub," corrected Calamity. "It was in the summer of 1866, if I remember. Say, Joy, here comes Monk Clark. If yuh act like yo're workin', he mebbe won't come up here. That is, unless yuh want to see him."

"I don't," declared Joy.

"He's got a lot of money."

"I suppose he has," Joy picked up the shovel and began digging around the bush.

"And he ain't so bad lookin'," added Calamity thoughtfully.

Joy dropped the shovel and looked closely at Calamity.

"Are you pleading Monk Clark's cause?" she asked.

"My ——, I should say not! I was just kinda feelin' sorry for him, tha'ssall. Gee-mi-nee-e-e, he sure must love yuh! Any man that'll wear what he wore over here—"

"Quit it, Calamity! He's going down to the stable where dad is. I hope he stays there until he gets ready to go home."

Calamity squinted toward Clark, who was riding up to Hank Gregory, and turned back to his job of criticizing Joy's botanical efforts.

"I came past the Box X," offered Clark, after the customary greetings had been exchanged.

"Yeah? Understand Curley is fixin' things up over there."

"He's got a lot of fixin' to do, Hank."

Gregory laughed shortly and squinted toward the front of the house, where Joy and Calamity were arguing over the placing of a certain bush. Clark scowled toward them, but turned away.

"I don't know how yuh stand for that —— old fool around here," said Clark. "He's no good."

"Calamity? Oh, he's all right. Did yuh see Curley as yuh came past, Monk?"

"Yeah. I didn't stop. He'll starve to death on that ranch—if nothin' worse happens to him."

Gregory squinted at Clark closely.

"Meanin' what, Monk?"

"Well, yuh never can tell what might happen to him."

"Uh-huh." There was a note of suspicion in Gregory's voice. "I hope nothin' happens to him, Monk. Him and Joy are goin' to get married as soon as he gets the old place fixed up."

"Thasso?" Clark spat viciously. "Mebbe they will."

For several moments, the two men looked closely at each other. Gregory looked toward the house, his eyes narrowed against the sunlight. Then—

"I dunno what yuh mean by that, Monk. I told Curley that it would be all right with me. If Joy wants him, she sure can have him."

"I didn't say anythin'," replied Clark. "It's a free country. And another thing, Hank—you better not get too short with me. I play square with my friends, as long as they remain friends. I know too much about you, *sabe?*"

Gregory's lips shut tightly for several moments and he looked toward the house, while Clark grinned softly.

"I *sabe* all that," said Gregory softly.

"Might not listen well to some folks," suggested Clark.

Gregory shook his head.

"No, I reckon not. I've often wondered about it, Monk. I dunno whether I killed that sheriff or not."

"That part don't matter, Hank. There were three of yuh. Two of yore outfit died in their saddles. If it hadn't been for me, you'd have been hanged. Just stop and remember that I kept yuh under cover until the chase had died down enough for you to make a getaway. They're probably still lookin' for the man who killed the sheriff—and you was the only survivor."

Gregory nodded slowly.

"That's true, Monk. But I wasn't guilty of doin' anythin' wrong. I didn't know ther two fellers had stolen horses until it wa. all over. When a man begins to shoot at me, I shoot at him."

Clark smiled wisely.

"That's all very fine, but you'd have a fine time explainin' that to a jury in Badger County."

"Prob'ly—" slowly. Gregory's eyes were steady as he looked straight at Clark and said:

"Monk, why bring this up now? You ain't aimin' to hold a club over me, are yuh?"

"I just wanted yuh to know how I stand."

"That happened almost ten years ago, Monk."

"I know it. Almost long enough for us to forget, eh? But not quite, Hank."

"Uh-huh," Gregory laughed bitterly. "Almost like somethin' yuh read about, Monk. You know enough about me to send me to the penitentiary, and yo're willin' to use that knowledge to make me do what yuh want me to do, eh?"

"I don't think yo're a —— fool, Hank," coldly.

"No? Well, I am —— in some things, Monk."

Gregory shoved himself away from the stable wall and came closer to Clark.

"There are some things in which I don't show a lick of sense. When yo're playin' yore cards, Monk—remember this."

Clark scowled heavily. He had not counted on this.

"Just what things do yuh mean, Hank?" he asked.

"Anythin' affectin' Joy and Curley."

"Oh. Well, go ahead and be a —— fool, Hank. If you want that girl to starve to death with a rattle-headed cowpuncher, it's yore business, I reckon."

Monk Clark picked up his reins and climbed in to his saddle.

"Yuh can tell the sheriff that I'm here when he wants me," said Gregory.

Clark laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't be a fool. I've been yore friend a long time, Hank. I didn't think you'd turn me down. But if I happen to feel like it, I'll tell the sheriff."

He turned his horse and rode away. Joy and Calamity stopped their labors long enough to watch him ride down the road. They were laughing as they resumed their planting. Gregory leaned against the stable wall, his mind going back to a day, almost ten years before.

IT HAPPENED in a little county in a far corner of the State. Gregory was riding through, and joined with two congenial fellows, who were well mounted. Almost without warning they were fired upon by several mounted men.

Without any inkling that he was with two horse-thieves, Gregory returned their fire. The battle did not last long. Both of the thieves were shot from their saddles. Gregory saw one of the posse fall.

It was only through the speed of his horse that Gregory had been able to escape the posse. Monk Clark, who had been one of the posse, recognized Gregory's horse when Gregory came to his ranch that night.

Believing that honesty was the best policy, Gregory told his story to Clark, who seemed to accept Gregory's explanation. It was then that Clark told him that the sheriff had been killed and that his story would not save him if the authorities knew where he was.

The two horse-thieves were dead; so their testimony would not be available. Clark explained that the sheriff was well liked in that country; so well liked, in fact, that he—Gregory—would probably not be accorded a fair trial.

For over a week, he remained in hiding, until the excitement had died down, before leaving the ranch. Clark had kept him posted, and Gregory knew that they were looking for him for the killing of the sheriff.

Gregory had made his way back to the Moon River country, and later Monk Clark had acquired the Tin Cup outfit. But in all this time, Clark had never—until today, mentioned the incident.

It had been the natural thing for Gregory to assist Clark in any way possible, and Gregory had thought that Clark believed his story at the time of his escape. But guilty or innocent, Gregory knew that he could never prove it to a jury.

He wondered if Clark would use his knowledge. Gregory had never told it to any one else. Joy's mother had died before this happened, and Joy was living with her mother's sister in another State.

Gregory knew now that Monk Clark wanted Joy, and that he would do everything possible to prevent Joy from marrying Curley Adams. Gregory knew that Joy disliked Monk Clark and would be greatly amused at even a hint of her marrying him.

But Gregory was not worried about Monk doing anything to Joy. What he could and might do to Curley was a different matter. He knew Monk Clark for a determined man, and it seemed that Monk's conscience was fairly flexible.

He wanted to tell Curley to be on his guard, but it would be a difficult thing to explain without telling more than he cared to tell. It was nearly supper time when Curley rode in and announced that he was tired of his own cooking.

He exhibited some bruised fingernails as evidence that he had been working.

"Sawed my knee-cap three times today,"

he declared. "I've heard of architects puttin' their souls into their work; but I'm puttin' my flesh and blood in mine. Every darned nail I've got is hinged in the middle. What I need is a wide-faced hammer and some tacks."

"Joy cooked some apple pie," announced Calamity. "When we git through with the crusts I'm goin' to sew 'em together and make a cover for my old saddle. Rawhide! Whooee! I knowed a cook back in 1866 that made a pie and—"

"You was in the penitentiary in 1866," retorted Joy.

"Shore I was. This feller was the penitentiary cook, Joy. This cook says to me, 'Calamity, I'm—'"

"The penitentiary cooks don't speak to common prisoners."

"Is that so? Huh! He wasn't any better than I was. We was both in for the same crime—killin' a man."

"The same man?" grinned Curley.

"Yessir. By golly, it shore was a queer deal. Happened in a saloon. Me and this here cook are facin' the bar, when a jigger walks in on the other side of me. Him and this cook has had trouble, and the cook is layin' for him.

"I seen this cook pull his gun, and the other feller backs away from the bar. Well, sir, I steps in between 'em and tries to block the cook from shootin', but it wasn't no use. This danged cook shot me through the arm and the bullet killed this jigger as dead as a petrified fish. We both got sent to the penitentiary for it."

"Calamity, yo're an awful liar," said Curley. "Why should they send you to the penitentiary for what the cook did?"

"Well, sir," grinned Calamity, "the jury said that it was through me that this feller got killed, so I—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Calamity did a jig-step in to the kitchen, slapping himself on the leg.

"That is like most of Calamity's stories of 1866," laughed Joy. "He will chuckle over it to himself for a week."

"And swear at everything and everybody the rest of the time," grinned Curley.

"That's true, Curley. But Calamity is awful human. Get him alone and he's different. He doesn't really hate any one."

Gregory came in and shook hands with Curley. Joy went to the kitchen to help Calamity with the supper, and Gregory took Curley out on the front porch.

"Curley, I want to warn yuh to look out," said Gregory.

He had spoken so abruptly that Curley looked at him in amazement.

"What about, Gregory?"

"I can't tell yuh any more, Curley. Mebbe I'm barkin' up the wrong tree—mebbe not. But you know how easy it is to frame a crime on to a man. Keep yore eyes peeled, son."

"This ain't another 1866 joke is it?" asked Curley.

"I wish it was a joke."

Curley scratched his nose and looked thoughtfully at the man who was soon to become his father-in-law. Gregory was not joking, Curley knew. He glanced back toward the door.

"Nothin' concernin' Joy, is it?"

"If anythin' happened to you, it would affect her, don't yuh think?"

"Well—yes. Can't yuh give me any more information?"

"No. It may only be a suspicion, son. I hope it is. But I had to tell yuh."

"But why would any one want to frame a crime on me?"

"Yo're figurin' on marryin' Joy, ain't yuh?"

"You bet!"

"Uh-huh. Never stopped to think that there might be other men who would like to do the same thing, have yuh?"

"Oh!"

Curley's eyes widened momentarily and he started to say a name, but shut his lips tightly. He knew what Gregory meant, now. And Gregory knew that there was no need to mention any names.

"I'm much obliged," said Curley slowly. "I'll kinda keep my eye peeled—thank yuh."

Calamity was yelling for them to "come and get it!" so they changed the conversation and went to the dining-room.

"I heard that yuh busted a feller in the jaw the other day, Curley," said Calamity. "That new feller on the Tin Cup."

"Moran," said Gregory.

"It wasn't anythin'," smiled Curley. "He got fresh."

"Yeah, I heard he did. Worked for the Lazy H a while. I seen him ridin' with Sam Ertle. Know anythin' about him?"

"Not much, Calamity. He was with the Tin Cup while I was there, but we didn't have much to do with each other. He came to work while I was sick in bed."

"You had quite a time, didn't yuh?" observed Gregory. "Monk Clark thought yuh was goin' to have pneumonia."

"I guess I did almost have it. They kept me in bed for over a week."

"And I came very near coming home," said Joy. "I didn't get a letter from you for over two weeks."

"Well, I couldn't help it, Joy. By golly, I sure was helpless. That Crescent City doctor didn't know what to do. The boys took turns settin' up with me. It was mighty fine of 'em."

"How's the ranch comin'?" asked Calamity.

"Kinda slow. Gee, I never knew there was as many things to be repaired. It's worse than building a new place. But I've got one room rain-tight, I think. It's fun though."

"That's what love does to yuh," said Calamity. "I remember a feller that fell in love back in 1866—"

But that was as far as he got, because Curley reached for the coffee-pot, and Calamity subsided with a chuckle.

Curley did not tell Joy what her father had told him. He knew that Gregory had meant Monk Clark, and he wondered just what Monk would be able to do. They had always been friendly enough—as friendly as Monk usually was with any of his cowboys.

Curley had urged Joy to marry him at once, but she told him to wait until he had fixed up the old ranch. Calamity nearly floored them all by offering to come down and help Curley with his carpenter work.

"Well, that's sure fine," said Curley. "But do you know anything about carpentering, Calamity?"

"Do I? Huh! Say, I knowed a carpenter in 1866—"

All of which was sufficient proof that Calamity knew all about the building trade.

THAT same afternoon Skeeter Bill sat on a counter in Mike Gower's store, playing with a three-legged gray cat whose name was Shy. Old Mike lounged on the counter and puffed at his old pipe, which sizzled like a frying egg.

"Curley Adams might make a go of the old ranch," said Mike thoughtfully. "He's a good sort of a kid, yuh know. The old place ain't worth much, and it didn't cost him much."

"Looks kinda tumble-down," nodded Skeeter. "Still, I like to see a young feller try to make a start. Yuh might hand me down a box of forty-fives, Gower."

The old storekeeper lifted a box of cartridges off a shelf and slid them over to Skeeter, who examined the label of the box.

"You carry quite a stock of cartridges, don't yuh?" observed Skeeter.

"I have to. Of course, there's certain sizes that I never have any call for. Nobody shoots anythin' smaller than a .38. Mostly .44's and .45's."

"Ever have any calls for .41's?"

"Not very much. Curley Adams has a .41. He's one of them fellers that likes to experiment; so he has me buy a reloadin' set for him. He tries different kinds of powder and all that. I dunno what he finally decides to do. One of the boys at the Tin Cup said that Curley had ruined every tin-can on the ranch."

"Loadin' his own shells, eh?"

"I s'pose so. Anyway, he ain't asked me to stock any .41's since I got him that outfit."

Skeeter opened his box and filled the loops in his belt. The fact that Curley Adams owned a reloading set for a .41 revolver, and used a .41, made it interesting knowledge.

"Don't any one else use a .41 around here?" asked Skeeter.

"Not that I know of. Mostly everybody buys their shells from me. I can get yuh some if yuh—"

"No, I didn't want any. I never used one."

He patted the gray cat, adjusted his belt and walked back to the office, where he found Kaintuck playing solitaire.

"What did yuh find out?" asked Kaintuck.

"I found out that Curley Adams owns a .41, and also owns a reloading outfit."

Kaintuck whistled softly, as he gathered up his cards.

"Anybody else around here own a .41, Skeeter?"

"I reckon not."

"It means that we'll have to investigate Mr. Adams, eh?"

"I dunno, Kaintuck. Mebbe somebody else owns a .41. We'll keep this under our hats and see what else we can find out."

A little later they went to the Half-Moon Saloon, where they met Sam Ertle, owner

of the Lazy H, and "Frisco" Larkin, one of Ertle's cowpunchers. Frisco was a tall, saturnine sort of person, with buck-teeth and a bald head.

Ertle was not a congenial sort of cowman. He was not inclined to conversation and seemed to mind his own business fairly well. Some one had told him about the silver robbery, and it was the topic of conversation when Skeeter and Kaintuck came in.

"Jist how in —— could yuh steal a thousand pounds of silver?" Frisco wanted to know, but no one seemed able to enlighten him.

"And if yuh got it, what would yuh do with it?" asked Frisco.

"You might ask the sheriff," smiled the bartender.

Frisco squinted at Skeeter Bill closely. He had imbibed a few drinks and desired an argument.

"All right; I ask him," said Frisco. "From what I've heard about him, he don't know a —— of a lot; so I don't expect him to answer my question."

"Then I'm not goin' to disappoint yuh," smiled Skeeter.

Frisco laughed and pounded on the bar. "Name yore weapons, gents. I've found a sheriff that ain't afraid to admit he's ignorant. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Ain't goin' to disappoint me, eh?"

Frisco fairly leered at Skeeter, who kept his temper admirably, much to the disgust of Kaintuck.

"I never like to disappoint anybody," said Skeeter evenly.

"Sure yuh don't," fleered Frisco. "Everybody says that about yuh. They don't expect anythin' from yuh—and they don't get anythin'. Yuh sure are some sheriff, I'd tell a man."

"Yeah, I'm good," admitted Skeeter slowly.

"Well, for ——'s sake!" exploded Kaintuck disgustedly.

Frisco squinted at Kaintuck closely, blinking his eyes as though the deputy was of some strange species. He ignored Skeeter now, concentrating entirely on Kaintuck.

"Now, whatcha s'pose this is?" he queried.

Kaintuck's left hand went slowly up to the brim of his wide sombrero, crumpled the edge of it slightly, as though about to wipe off his brow with the back of his hand.

THEN, as quick as a flash, he whipped the hat off his head and slashed Frisco across the face with it. It was done so quickly and took Frisco so utterly by surprize that he staggered back against the bar, throwing both hands up to his eyes.

As Kaintuck's left hand swept aside and as Frisco's hands went up to protect his eyes, Kaintuck took a half step forward and drove his right fist in to Frisco's anatomy, just below the arch of his breast-bone.

It was a terrific punch. Frisco's hands dropped limply, his eyes rolled, and he slumped down between the rail and the bar, knocked completely out. Kaintuck stepped back, put on his hat and leaned one elbow against the bar, looking down curiously at Frisco, who had not moved again.

"Nobody but a —— fool ever starts trouble and ain't set to meet it," said Kaintuck dryly.

"There's a lot of truth in that," said the bartender.

Ertle did not say a word, but managed to drag Frisco away from the bar and stretch him out in the middle of the room.

"You sure sung him to sleep," stated the bartender, as he walked around the bar, carrying a glass of water, which he threw in Frisco's face.

The shock of the cold water partly revived Frisco, who was able to sit up and groan hollowly and clutch at his stomach.

"He won't give a —— what the cook puts on the table to-night," said Kaintuck.

Ertle gave Kaintuck a side glance, but kept his lips shut.

After another minute Frisco was able to get to his feet and slump back into a chair. He was still a mighty sick man.

"How'r yuh comin', Frisco?" asked Ertle.

Frisco shook his head, his lips compressed painfully. Then he got to his feet and went outside with Ertle, where he leaned on the hitch-rack until his breathing apparatus began to function normally again.

"What I don't understand is why you didn't hit him, Skeeter," complained Kaintuck. "Are you gettin' meek, cowboy?"

"I'm the sheriff," grinned Skeeter. "I ain't got no right to fight everybody that disagrees with me."

"Uh-huh? Say, that don't affect me, does it?"

"It didn't seem to. But yuh don't need

to feel contrite over it. That pelican was cravin' trouble."

"He was." The bartender was emphatic.

"Well, his cravin' ought to be satisfied," grinned Kaintuck. "Unless the man is a reg'lar hog for punishment, he ought to be plumb pleased over his success."

"He didn't show good sense"—thus the bartender, polishing the top of the bar industriously—"wanted trouble and didn't look for it. He's mostly always like that when he's drinkin'."

Kaintuck walked to the door and looked toward the hitch-rack, where Ertle and Frisco were having a heated argument. Ertle had hold of Frisco's arm and was trying to dissuade him from doing something.

"Well, go ahead and be a —— fool, then!" snorted Ertle.

Frisco yanked away from him and started back toward the saloon door. It was evident to Kaintuck that Frisco was coming back to wipe out the disgrace.

He stepped aside, flattened himself against the wall, and the maddened Frisco walked past him, squinting at the bar, where Skeeter and the bartender were standing, wondering what it was all about. Kaintuck saw that Frisco had drawn his gun and was carrying it behind him.

For a moment Frisco stared at the two men, and in that moment Kaintuck's revolver barrel rapped him sharply across the knuckles of his right hand, causing him to drop the gun. He whirled quickly and found himself looking into the muzzle of Kaintuck's .45.

Kaintuck kicked Frisco's gun aside and motioned for Frisco to get out of the saloon.

"You must be one of them fellers who never know when they're whipped, ain't yuh?" queried Kaintuck. "I ought to pistol-whip yuh right here and give the doctor somethin' to sew up, you bat-eared ant-eater. Git on yore bronc and go home."

Kaintuck followed Frisco to the hitch-rack. Ertle had come back to the saloon door, but preceded Frisco and Kaintuck to the rack. They mounted their horses and rode out of town, with never a backward glance, while Skeeter and the bartender stood in the doorway and grinned at each other.

"You've got a real capable deputy," observed the bartender.

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" cautioned Skeeter. "Don't let him hear it. The first thing he knows he'll be thinkin' he is somebody."

Kaintuck swaggered back to the saloon and picked up Frisco's gun.

"Give it to the bartender," said Skeeter. "He can give it to Frisco the first time he shows up."

Kaintuck was examining the gun intently, but did not give it to the bartender. Moran and Monk Clark came in. They nodded to Skeeter and Kaintuck, who took advantage of their coming to leave the saloon.

Back in their office Kaintuck took the gun from his pocket and handed it to Skeeter. It was a Colt .41.

"That's why I didn't give it to the bartender," said Kaintuck. "And I don't want yuh to forget that that is my clue."

"It sure is," grinned Skeeter. "And you earned it, cowboy. That makes two .41's in evidence. If we get any more, we're up against it. You better look out for Frisco. He came back there to kill yuh, that's a cinch."

"He sure did. I'd like to know why he tried to pick trouble with you, Skeeter. We've never done anythin' to him."

"Mebbe he ain't killed no sheriff yet," grinned Skeeter. "He strikes me as bein' one of them fellers that won't be satisfied until they've killed a sheriff. He's a bad boy."

"He ain't so bad as he used to was," grinned Kaintuck. "If he wants his gun back he's got to say please, Mister Kennedy'—which he won't do; so I'll keep the gun."

It was about fifteen minutes later that Clark and Moran rode past the office, going south. Moran gave them a friendly wave, but Clark did not turn his head. They had disappeared when Kaintuck saw the bartender standing in the door of the Half-Moon, waving at him.

Curiosity impelled them both to go back to the saloon.

"Clark didn't stop at your place, eh?" said the dispenser of drinks.

"Why should he?" asked Skeeter.

"Well, from what they said I thought sure he would. They're on the way to the Lazy H to see Sam Ertle. It seems that Monk Clark found a yearlin' heifer today, which had a vented brand on its right hip, and a fresh Box X on its left shoulder."

"Yeah?" Skeeter's eyebrows lifted slightly. "Uh-huh. Meanin' that—" He

hesitated for a moment. "On the right hip, eh? Who brands on the right hip?"

"The Lazy H."

"Anybody else around here?"

"No. The Tin Cup brand on the right shoulder, HG on the left hip—and the Box X on the left shoulder."

"Then they must 'a' vented a Lazy H, eh?"

"Looks like it. I heard Monk and Moran talkin' about it. It seems that Monk had started for the Gregory ranch, but run into this heifer. He said the new brand made him suspicious; so he roped the animal and put it in an old corral on Deer Creek, between here and the Box X. He cut back to the road and run in to Moran who was comin' to town."

"It's kinda funny he didn't come to me," mused Skeeter. "Bein' the sheriff, I'm interested in cattle stealin'."

"Yuh ought to be," smiled the bartender.

Skeeter paid for a round of drinks and led the way back to the office, going straight through the place and out to the little stable at the rear. Kaintuck looked at him curiously, but saddled his horse without comment.

Frisco Larkin was in a vile frame of mind when he got back to the Lazy H ranch. It was the first time he had ever been completely knocked out—the first time he had ever lost his six-shooter. To a man like him nothing could have been more humiliating.

FRISCO was not endowed with an overabundance of imagination, but he had a certain amount of pride, and it galled him deeply to think that he had been whipped. As he rode along through the dust he removed his hat and wiped his bald head with a flirting motion of his hand.

His stomach was still fluttering, and there was a great vacancy beneath his breastbone. He shifted painfully in his saddle, spat between his front teeth and spurred his horse savagely. He wanted revenge on something. Then he yanked cruelly on the reins, almost throwing his horse off the road.

He roweled the animal savagely and raced it all the way to the Tin Cup ranch, where he dismounted and sat down in the shade of the stable, trying to ease his cramping insides.

Van Cleve, Ertle's other cowboy, a stolid-faced person, with scraggly, yellow mustaches and a crooked mouth came down from the ranch-house, wondering what was the matter with Frisco. His teeth were like aged tombstones in a badly-kept cemetery—sadly out of line.

"You got a stummick-ache?" he asked.

"Uh-huh."

"Et somethin' yuh hadn't ort to, eh?"

"Na-a-aw! Deputy sheriff hit me in the belly."

Van Cleve filled his pipe slowly, lighted it, and sat down with Frisco, who told his story in meager detail.

"I'm prob'ly goin' to kill him for that," declared Frisco, after his story was finished.

Van Cleve had little to say. He gave Frisco another gun and a box of cartridges, closing the incident, as far as he was concerned. But it was not closed as far as Frisco was concerned.

"And when yuh went back to kill him, he took yore gun?" asked Van Cleve.

It seemed marvelous to Van Cleve; so marvelous that he picked his teeth thoughtfully with the blade of his pocket-knife.

"Bad hombre," he said, after careful consideration.

"Hit me when I wasn't lookin'," said Frisco.

"What was yuh lookin' at?"

"Oh, ——!" Frisco felt too badly to explain. "Did yuh ever get hit real hard right here?" He indicated his solar plexus.

Van Cleve shook his head.

"Never got hit anywhere, except in the back."

"Somebody sneak up on yuh, Van?"

"Na-a-a-aw, ——! They outrun me."

"You think this is funny, don'tcha?"—indignantly.

"'F I do, it's because I can't help m'self, Frisco. You poked yore beak in to the molasses and got it stuck, tha'sall."

"Yeah, and I'll poke it some more, if I want to."

"Thasso? Frisco, you've got intestinal trouble, ain'tcha?"

"What do yuh mean?"

"Yo're overbalanced."

"Meanin' what?"

"Too much guts and too few brains. I dunno how in —— he ever knocked yuh down."

"That will be about all," said Ertle warningly. "There's been enough fighting."

As Ertle turned toward the house, Monk

Clark and Frank Moran came in sight. Ertle stooped and waited for them to ride up. Clark and Ertle exchanged nods of greeting, and Clark came right to the point.

"I've got a heifer in the old corral on Deer Creek, waitin' for you to look it over, Sam. There's a fresh brand vent on the right hip, and a new Box X on the left shoulder. Kinda thought yuh might be interested."

Ertle scowled heavily.

"Thasso?" He turned to Frisco and Van Cleve. "Saddle up the horses."

Ertle walked to the house and came back carrying a rifle in a scabbard, which he fastened to his saddle, when Frisco came with the horse.

"Old Deer Creek corral, eh?" He asked Monk Clark.

"Yeah. We'll ride over with yuh, Sam."

"The more the merrier. Did yuh tell the sheriff?"

"I did not."

"Suits me. Let's go."

The five men rode away from the Lazy H, heading straight for the bridge across Moon River, after which they swung to the northeast, passing between Crescent City and the Gregory ranch.

It was only about eight miles, but they were unable to make much speed across the hills. There was little conversation. They struck Deer Creek about a quarter of a mile below the old corral, but rode along the ridges to a point above the small flat where the old corral was located.

Even at a distance they could see the spotted yearling, moving about the dusty old enclosure. They went down the hill, crossed the little creek and drew up at the corral fence. Clark and Ertle dismounted and climbed over the fence, while the yearling circled wildly. The process of branding an animal does not serve to make it gentle in any way.

THE two men stopped near the center of the corral. Ertle was carrying a coiled lariat, which he shook out and roped the animal on the first throw. It bawled and protested, but he drew it up to an old snubbing-post in the center of the corral, while they looked it over.

Ertle walked around it, his eyes half closed, and came back to Monk Clark whose face registered extreme wonder.

But Clark did not speak. He looked at Ertle, as though wondering what thoughts might lie behind the keen eyes of the wiry little cattleman. And Clark knew he was treading on thin ice.

Ertle stepped away from him, circled the animal and came back to face Clark. He pointed at the yearling.

"Does this happen to be the one yuh mentioned, Clark?" Ertle's voice was pitched low.

"Well, by ——, it looks like it! But—"

The other cowboys had climbed the fence and were gazing at the animal. On its two hips were burned splotches, where brands had been eliminated, as also was a burned area on its left shoulder. But on the right shoulder, clumsily drawn but unmistakable, the outline of the Tin Cup brand.

"I don't understand—" began Clark, his face black with wrath. He choked raspingly. "When I left here that yearlin'—"

Ertle's sarcastic laugh interrupted him.

"Somebody was just as smart as you was, Monk. It looks like the deadwood was on the Tin Cup, and not on the Box X."

"You don't think I'd slap my brand on a Lazy H, and then call yore attention to it, do yuh?" demanded Monk belligerently.

"Nobody has proved it to be a Lazy H. With three vented brands on it, yuh can call it what yuh like. It looks to me as though it was a Tin Cup right now. If I was in yore place, I'd herd that —— critter home and make veal out of it before anybody else finds out what you've done."

Ertle turned on his heel, climbed the fence and went back to his horse, followed by Frisco and Van Cleve. They mounted and rode away, while Clark leaned against the snubbing-post and swore roundly, much to the amusement of Frank Moran, who perched on the top pole of the corral and smoked a cigaret.

Monk Clark walked over to the corral fence and watched Ertle and his two men ride away. He looked back at the calf and swore witheringly. He knew positively that some one had found this calf and had branded it again, wiping out all trace of the brand which would incriminate Curley Adams.

Clark walked back and examined the brands closely, while the calf bawled some more and kicked up dust. Satisfied that there was no trace left of any original brand, Clark turned to Moran.

"That —— pup of an Adams saw me corral that heifer," complained Clark. "He sneaked in and balled up everythin'."

"What would yuh expect him to do?" grinned Moran. "If I was in yore place, I'd drop the whole thing, Clark. You haven't any proof that Curley Adams did the job, and if Adams hears about it you might get in trouble."

Clark cursed witheringly, as he took Ertle's rope off the animal, threw the rope aside and let down the bars.

"Goin' to take Ertle's advice?" asked Moran, as they mounted their horses.

"What in —— else can I do? Be a —— of a fine thing for somebody to find a heifer with three vented brands on it—and my brand put on with a runnin'-iron."

Monk Clark rode in to the corral to chase the yearling out, when Moran whistled warningly. Skeeter Bill and Kaintuck had ridden out of the brush just above the corral, and were coming toward them.

Monk Clark spat out a curse against all sheriffs and other meddling fools, and tried to make the yearling break for freedom. But with the perversity of its species, the yearling ignored the opening and ran around behind Clark.

Clark stopped, shifted his gun and wiped the perspiration from his face, while the calf came close to him, nosing out toward the man who would have given many dollars to have been miles away at this time. Clark looked appealingly at Moran, but that worthy was watching the officers approach, a half grin on his thin lips.

Skeeter and Kaintuck rode up to the corral opening, nodding pleasantly to both men. Clark glowered heavily, but Moran wore an amused smile. It was nothing to him.

"You prob'ly didn't know we were in town when yuh went out to the Lazy H," said Skeeter slowly, eyeing the heifer. "We heard that somethin' was wrong out here; so we came out."

"Oh, the —— you did!" snorted Clark.

Skeeter and Kaintuck were looking closely at the vented brands, and now they looked at each other.

"That darned bartender never got it right," observed Kaintuck. "He said that a Lazy H had been vented and a Box X run on. Shucks, there's been three brands vented and the Tin Cup run on."

Skeeter dismounted and came inside the corral. Clark eyed him narrowly, wondering just what this lean-faced, inquisitive-looking sheriff might do in a case of this kind. He watched anxiously as Skeeter circled the animal, looking closely at the burned spots.

Skeeter seemed seriously amused, as he straightened up, hitched up his belt and looked knowingly at Kaintuck, who had ridden his horse up close to the fence and was rolling a cigaret. Clark coughed slightly, apologetically.

Skeeter looked at Monk Clark curiously.

"We had a hard time findin' this old corral, Clark."

"Yuh did, eh?"

"Yeah. I sure wish you'd tell us about them vented brands."

Clark shut his lips tightly and there was a strained expression around his eyes. He realized that he was in bad. Skeeter turned to Moran.

"What do you know about it, Moran?"

"Not a thing, Sheriff. He told me that a Lazy H had been vented and a Box X run on. We got Sam Ertle to come over—and this is what we found."

"By ——, I'd like to know who done it!" exploded Clark.

"Uh-huh," Skeeter nodded thoughtfully. "I dunno who would steal cattle for you, Clark—do you?"

Clark bristled angrily.

"Look here, Sheriff! Don't you—"

"I'm not doin' anythin'," protested Skeeter angrily. "It looks to me as though the heifer belongs to you."

"It does not!"

"All right. I'll take it back to town with me."

"Back to town? What in —— do yuh want to take it to town for?"

"See if I can find out who owns the darned thing."

CLARK swallowed heavily and scowled at the offending animal. It put him in a ridiculous position, and he realized that every one in the Moon River country would hear about it.

It looked as if he had made a clumsy attempt to steal a heifer. Of course it would be impossible to tell who had been the original owner, but that would not lessen the fact that the animal did not belong to him. He squinted at the right shoulder

of the animal, a painful scowl on his face. The outline of a tin cup was too plainly drawn for any one to mistake it.

"Well," he said slowly, "can't we arrange this, Sheriff? You can see where it puts me."

"Yeah, I can see that," smiled Skeeter. "If I was doin' my duty I'd arrest you, Clark. If I was you, I'd herd that heifer home, make meat of it and burn the hide."

"Is that all right with you?"

"I'll make it all right, I reckon." Skeeter turned his horse and motioned to Kaintuck, who followed him. Skeeter looked back at Clark and said:

"It's all right this time, Clark; but I don't want to see any more vented brands around this country. You caught me when I was feelin' awful good-natured."

Skeeter and Kaintuck crossed the creek and rode over the ridge, where they looked back to see Clark and Moran going in the opposite direction, herding a frightened heifer. Kaintuck looked at Skeeter and they both doubled over their saddle-horns, choking with unholy mirth.

"Mamma, pin a rose on me!" howled Kaintuck. "Caught yuh when yuh was feelin' awful good-natured! Haw, haw, haw, haw!"

Kaintuck grew incoherent at sight of the tears running down Skeeter's face. The tall cowboy was unable to talk.

"We had him foul," choked Kaintuck. "My ——, it's too bad we wasn't there when Sam Ertle seen the critter."

Skeeter managed to clear his throat.

"I like t' died all the time, Kaintuck. The expression on Clark's face was the funniest thing I ever seen."

"And we didn't finish any too danged quick either," said Kaintuck. "I never drawed a picture of a tin cup with a hot cinch-ring before in my life. Haw, haw, haw, haw! It sure was a shame to burn places where there wasn't any brand."

"We had to make it a puzzle," said Skeeter laughing. "I'm not sure that Monk Clark tried to hang a crime on to Curley Adams, but somebody did. That kid is too smart to do a thing like that.

"Curley hit Moran that night, and that would make Moran hate Curley. Mebbe Moran did the job to put Curley in bad, and Monk Clark happened to find the animal."

"That would be a —— of a thing for a Government detective to do, wouldn't it, Skeeter?"

"Sure it would. But yuh never can tell anythin' about a detective, because they're just human bein's, Kaintuck."

"That's right, I s'pose. And I've an idea that Monk Clark ain't goin' to like us so awful well after this."

"Tha'sall right. We're goin' to be disliked a lot before this deal is all finished. Shake up that goat yo're ridin', or we'll be late for supper."

But there was little mirth in the heart of Monk Clark as he herded the misbranded heifer toward the Tin Cup ranch, assisted by Moran, who had offered no sympathy nor advice.

"That sheriff is all right," offered Moran.

Clark spurred around the animal, cutting it off from going down the side of a coulée, and rode back beside Moran.

"Yuh think he's all right, do yuh?"

"He let you off easy."

Clark shut his jaws savagely, but was forced to admit that Moran was right.

"Yuh just played in hard luck, Clark. Adams saw yuh corral the critter, came over and saw what yuh had done, and proceeded to ruin things."

"If I thought—if I knew that for a fact, I'd kill that —— puncher," said Clark evenly. "But I don't know. Mebbe it was Gregory or Calamity. Either one of 'em would do it for Curley."

"I suppose," nodded Moran.

They drove the heifer down through a brushy swale, and Clark spurred in close to it, forcing it against a barrier of greasewood, where it tried to turn back past him. Shooting from his hip he dropped the animal the first shot. His horse swerved aside, whirling completly around, but he curbed it and dismounted.

With a few flicks of his knife he stripped the Tin Cup brand from its shoulder and flung it far off across the brush, where it hung, dangling from a limb for a moment and dropped into a thick bush.

"Give the coyotes a feed," he said as he mounted, and they rode on toward the Tin Cup in silence.

HANK GREGORY had been doing a lot of thinking about his conversation with Monk Clark. He wondered if it might not be a good thing to explain everything to Curley. He felt that Curley would keep the secret. Still, he did not want to share it with any one.

Old Calamity had ridden to Crescent City to get the mail and a few groceries, and Joy was still cleaning house. Calamity was glad to get away from the ranch, where Joy had drafted him in to the army of cleanliness.

Hank Gregory sat humped in a rocking-chair on the shady porch and chewed on the stem of his pipe, his soul troubled greatly. He had resolved to kill Monk Clark if Clark tried to interfere with the wedding. That much was settled in his mind.

Calamity came back and stabled his horse. Gregory could see that Calamity carried news by the way he hurried up from the stable. He tossed a mail-order catalogue on the porch, handed Gregory a newspaper and squinted through the front door.

He thought he heard Joy working in the kitchen, but she was on her knees behind a living-room chair, fixing the carpet. He stepped back to Gregory.

"Hank, there's a funny deal been pulled off," he said.

Joy straightened up and came closer to the doorway, as Calamity continued—

"Frisco Larkin was in town this mornin'. Got drunk and told everybody in sight that Monk Clark found a yearlin' with the Lazy H vented and the Box X run on."

Gregory stared at Calamity, his mind working fast.

"Monk and this Moran person went to get Ertle to look at the heifer, which was in the old Deer Creek corral, and when they got there somebody had vented the Box X and put on the Tin Cup. Ertle got mad and went home."

"Frisco told this?" wondered Gregory. "Meanin' that Curley Adams tried to steal a Lazy H yearlin', Calamity?"

"Yeah, it looks thataway, Hank. But somebody ruined it, don't yuh see. The laugh was on Monk Clark."

"The laugh, eh?" Gregory surged out of his chair. "Curley never done that, Calamity."

"He'd be an awful fool to do it," amended Calamity. "The Lazy H is the only one to brand on the right hip. A vented brand on the right hip means that it was a Lazy H."

"Monk Clark did it," said Gregory slowly." —— him! He wants to marry Joy, and he did this to jail Curley Adams."

"How do yuh know?" blurted Calamity.

"Never mind how I know." Gregory walked down the steps and went toward the stable.

Calamity sat down in the rocking-chair and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Joy had heard all of it.

It seemed ridiculous to think that Monk Clark wanted to marry her badly enough to try to fasten a crime to Curley. She shook her head wonderingly. Why, she had not spoken a dozen words to Monk Clark since she had come home. It must be that her father was wrong, she thought.

She peeked out at Calamity, who was still deep in thought, and walked to the window. Her father was saddling a horse at the corral, and she wondered whether he was going to town. He mounted and rode away through the big gate, but did not go toward town. He was going toward the Box X.

She walked back to the doorway. Calamity looked at her and scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"Wasn't much mail, Joy," he said. "How's the cleanin'?"

"I heard what you told Dad," she said.

"Yeah? Well," Calamity simulated a yawn, and rubbed his stubbly cheek, "I don't reckon it was any secret."

"Where has Dad gone, Calamity?"

"He didn't say, Joy."

"Haven't you any idea?"

"Well, yuh can't hardly call it an idea, Joy. He had a rifle under his knee, and I kinda think he went to kill Monk Clark."

Calamity spoke in a matter-of-fact way, as though a killing was nothing to speak about.

"You're joking, Calamity."

"I hope so, Joy. I've knowed yore father a long time, and I can kinda read him. Mebbe I'm wrong. If Monk Clark misbranded a critter to send Curley to the penitentiary, he shore needs killin'."

"But, Calamity, don't you realize what it would mean? They would hang him for murder. Oh, why didn't you stop him—make him listen to reason?"

"I dunno. It's a free country, Joy—and I don't like Monk Clark."

"But it is such a foolish idea, Calamity! Monk Clark doesn't want to marry me."

"Don't he?"

"Certainly not!"

"Shows —— bad taste then."

Joy knew that she could get no satisfaction out of talking with Calamity; so she

resolved to do the only thing possible to avert a tragedy.

She ran through the kitchen and down to the stable, where she saddled her own horse, a hammer-headed roan that had little brains but plenty of speed. Calamity stood at a corner of the porch and watched her ride after her father.

He did not offer to assist nor interfere. Calamity was absolutely neutral. Nobody could ever accuse him of stopping a fight, and if one man wanted to kill another, it was no affair of Calamity's.

The hammer-headed roan was not the best riding horse in the country, and Joy was having difficulty in convincing it that she was its master. A liberal application of the quirt showed the roan that its ways were not liked, and after that it decided to do better.

She knew that her father would waste no time, but there was a possibility that he might stop at the Box X; so she swung further down the slopes, where it was possible to make better time.

Joy was a good rider—a good hill rider, which is some different than riding on the flat. She knew all the tricks of helping a horse over tough going, and as a result she was able to make time where an inexperienced rider would have hunted for an easier way around.

And never before did she have such an incentive for speed. She felt sure that she could convince her father of the folly of his intentions. Even if Monk Clark was guilty of an attempt to send Curley to the penitentiary, he had failed, she reasoned.

And it was Curley's battle, not her father's. She could not understand her father's sudden animosity toward Monk Clark, because they had always been friendly, as far as she knew. And while she commended her father's attitude in defense of the man she was to marry, she did not agree that he should commit murder for something which had not injured Curley.

She sent the roan scrambling over a ridge and galloped him straight down the brushy hill, where a slip might send horse and rider pin-wheeling to the rocky bottom. They hit the bottom in a cloud of dust and a shower of stones, but the roan gamely kept its feet and lurched into a gallop down the slope to Deer Creek.

She crossed Deer Creek near the old corral and continued straight north, intending to strike the Tin Cup road about two miles from the ranch, but when she reached the old road, which led east to the Box X, she hesitated. Something seemed to tell her to take this road.

"He might have stopped at the old ranch," she told herself, and turned in that direction. There was plenty of run left in the roan and it did not take her long to cover the mile to the Box X.

She could see a man near the ranch-house and a saddled horse stood between the house and the old stable. A closer inspection convinced her that the horse was the one her father had ridden from home.

She rode up beside the house and dismounted. Her father was standing just in front of the house, looking at something on the ground. He had seen her coming, but did not look up as she walked up to him.

LYING in front of him, half-hidden in the rank growth of foxtail grass, was Monk Clark, his sightless eyes staring at the sky. His right elbow was bent, and in his right hand was a cocked six-shooter. He had drawn the gun, cocked it, but died before he could pull the trigger.

Joy's face blanched at sight of him and she drew back, staring at her father.

She knew now that she had come too late. He had ridden faster than she had anticipated, and had met Monk Clark at the Box X. She looked down at him, a big hunk of lifeless clay, his jaw sagging. It seemed as though he might be yelling a battle cry, his gun lifted for a shot. She could not realize that Clark was dead.

She looked at her father, hardly able to tear her eyes away from the face of the dead man, and found him staring into space. His shoulders were bowed, as though bearing a great weight, and he seemed to have aged years in an hour.

A wild canary swung from a stunted bush near them and began singing. Joy turned and looked at the little yellow bird, wondering that anything could be happy now. She looked at Monk Clark and shuddered sickeningly. Her father spoke—

"How did yuh happen to follow me?" he asked softly.

"To try and stop you, Dad," she said hoarsely. "I heard what Calamity told you, and I—I knew why you came."

"I heard shots," he said wearily. "They sounded like they were fired over here. But I didn't see anybody. You can see him from the front porch."

"Didn't you kill him, Dad?"

Gregory shook his head.

"I didn't have a chance, Joy. Somebody beat me to it."

Somebody beat him to it, wondered Joy? Somebody? Who was the somebody who would shoot Monk Clark? She looked at her father and found him looking at her, his eyes filled with sorrow. They were thinking the same thing, and both knew it. Gregory compressed his lips, turned his head and looked at Monk Clark.

Joy's lips felt like leather when she tried to moisten them with a dry tongue, and there was a tightness about her throat, an aching tightness that hurt her to breathe. Her voice sounded far away, thin, vibrant, as she said—

"Who? Oh, Dad, you don't suppose Curley—"

"Hush! We don't know."

"Well, he can't hear me. There is only us, Dad. You don't suppose—oh, here comes somebody!"

Joy grasped her father's arm and pointed at the two riders who were coming toward the ranch.

"We can't prove anything, don't you see?" she panted. "Oh, what will we do?"

"Keep yore nerve," he cautioned her, as the riders drew closer. "I didn't kill him, and we don't know who did."

It was Skeeter Bill and Kaintuck. Both of them had met Gregory, but not Joy. They dismounted and came across the yard.

"Howdy," greeted Skeeter. "Nice day, folks."

Gregory nodded, but his answer to the greeting was to indicate the body of Monk Clark. Skeeter moved in closer, flanked by Kaintuck, who whistled softly through his teeth. Skeeter dropped on his knees and examined the body closely.

Skeeter did not hurry. He slowly unbuttoned Clark's shirt and examined the bullet holes. He sat back on his heels, looking the body over, and his eyes roamed back to the house, as though estimating where the person had been who fired the shot. He took hold of the gun in Clark's hand, and found it clutched in a death grip.

Kaintuck leaned down, still whistling through his teeth, and looked at the bared chest of the dead man. Joy had taken her father by the arm, her eyes squinted with pain, thinking what it was going to mean for all of them. Skeeter turned to them.

"Shot twice," he said. "Second one must 'a' cut him off quick. First one went through his left shoulder."

Skeeter got to his feet and brushed the dust off his knees, as he looked questioningly at Gregory.

"I don't know who killed him," said Gregory. "I stopped here to see Curley Adams, and from the porch I could see the body lying out here."

"Uh-huh," Skeeter squinted thoughtfully. "Didja hear any shots?"

"Yeah, I did. That's why I came."

Skeeter turned and looked at Joy.

"It kinda seems as though nobody is goin' to introduce us, ma'am. I know yo're Miss Gregory. I'm Sarg, the sheriff. I want yuh to meet Kennedy, my deputy."

Joy's hand trembled as she shook hands with the two officers, but their grins were reassuring.

"You came in kind of a hurry, didn't yuh?" asked Skeeter.

"Why, I—I—what makes you think I did?" stammered Joy.

"Well, for one thing, yuh forgot to put a saddle-blanket on yore horse, and yo're still wearin' an apron."

For the first time Joy realized that she was wearing her old cleaning apron, no hat, and an old pair of shoes. And she remembered that she had forgotten to put a saddle-blanket on her horse.

"She came after me," said Gregory. "She had an idea I was goin' to the Tin Cup ranch to kill Monk Clark. She had just got here when you showed up."

"Uh-huh," nodded Skeeter. He knew that Gregory was telling the truth. "She thought you was goin' to the Tin Cup to kill Monk Clark, eh?"

Gregory nodded.

"And that's where I was goin', Sheriff."

The admission was a decided shock to Joy, but did not seem of any great moment to Skeeter Bill.

"Mind tellin' us why yuh wanted to kill Clark, Gregory?"

"Not at all. Clark wanted to marry my daughter, who is goin' to marry Curley Adams. I heard that Clark found a yearlin', on which the Lazy H had been vented and the Box X run on. So I knew that

Monk Clark had tried to send Curley to the penitentiary."

Skeeter and Kaintuck exchanged quick glances. They knew all about that part of it.

Skeeter nodded and walked back to the porch, where he looked back toward them. He could see the body plainly from there. He sat down on the steps and they came up to him.

"What do yuh make of it?" asked Kaintuck.

"I dunno. There's one thing sure—Monk Clark is dead. And the worst of it is, he was killed here. Dang it, I'm sorry!"

"Will it incriminate Curley?" asked Joy quickly.

"Unless he can prove where he was at the time."

"Oh, I know he didn't do it," said Joy tearfully.

"I sure hope yo're right," Skeeter got up and moved over to a lower corner of the steps, where he examined the ground.

"Kinda funny," he muttered, squinting back toward the body.

After another examination of the ground he walked back and squatted beside the body again, while the three people on the porch watched and wondered what he had discovered.

Kaintuck stepped down and looked at the ground, which had seemed of interest to Skeeter. On the sandy soil was a dark colored spot, still damp, covering a space about a foot square.

Skeeter got to his feet and walked back to the porch.

"It kinda looks to me like Monk Clark was shot right here beside the porch," he stated. "There's a big spot of blood at the corner of the porch, and hardly any out at the body. His gun is gripped awful tight in his hand, which might happen when a man is killed so quickly, and I find where his heels scraped along the ground, as he was carried out there."

"But what does that signify?" asked Joy.

"I dunno, ma'am. It kinda looks as though he came up to the porch and got killed. Mebbe the man who killed him wanted to get rid of the body and started out to hide it, but seen yore dad coming and made his getaway."

"That sounds reasonable," nodded Gregory. "It wasn't so long after the shots were fired that I came. Possibly ten minutes."

"Have you been in the house?" asked Skeeter.

"No. I came on the porch and called Curley's name. There was no answer, and when I looked around I saw the body. I was out there lookin' at it when Joy rode up. You came a few minutes later."

"Might be worth while to look around a little," suggested Skeeter.

The front door was partly open; so they went in. The living-room of the old ranch-house was about sixteen by twenty-four feet in size, with a large stone fireplace in the front, right-hand corner.

There were no furnishings, and the wall-paper, discolored by age, was nearly all peeled from the rough board walls. The boards of the floor were broken and warped, and the windows had been patched with cardboard, newspapers and other opaque materials, until little light filtered in.

Skeeter walked directly to the fireplace, where a number of scattered, fire-blackened bricks were lying, and found that the bottom of the fireplace had been recently torn out, disclosing a cavity about three feet long, two feet wide and two feet deep.

"Looks like Curley had been rebuildin' his fireplace," observed Kaintuck.

SKEETER made no comment. He had picked up a piece of metal, which greatly resembled silver; a splattery-looking piece, which looked as though it had been spilled while melted. Down in the cavity he found another piece, which appeared to be a silver dollar on one side, but a blank on the other. The imprint of the coin was not well done.

"What in the world is that?" asked Joy.

Skeeter handed her the piece of metal and continued his search, but there was nothing more to be found, except a fragment of white substance, which might have been plaster-of-paris.

"It looks as though somebody had tried to make a dollar," said Gregory.

"Yeah, it does," agreed Skeeter thoughtfully. "We better look around a little more."

At the rear of the living-room were two doors, one of which opened to a bedroom, the room which Curley had been repairing, and the other to the kitchen and dining-room, which were still in need of repairs.

The bedroom contained Curley's personal effects, and on a shelf Skeeter discovered the reloading outfit, a small can of powder and a bullet-mold. But there was nothing to indicate tragedy.

Further search disclosed the fact that Curley's horse and saddle were not at the stable. While Kaintuck, Joy and Gregory argued over what might have happened, Skeeter mounted his horse and rode back over the route taken by Gregory on his way to the ranch.

He came back in a few minutes and went to the west side of the house, searching the ground closely.

"What did yuh find out?" asked Kaintuck.

"Not very much," said Skeeter. "A man had his horse here on this side of the house. He was in the house when Clark came up to the steps, and he shot Clark.

"He wanted to hide the body, I reckon, but he saw Gregory on the sky-line of that hill back there; so he dropped the body, ran back to his horse and rode south-west. The house would mask him from Gregory until he was able to cut down through the brush and in to that gully. Clark's horse is down in the brush, tied to an old snag. He probably sneaked up here on foot."

"Well, I'd say yuh found out quite a lot," said Kaintuck.

"But why would Monk Clark sneak up here?" asked Joy.

Skeeter squinted at Clark's body.

"Didn't you say that Clark tried to put Curley Adams in bad because he wanted to marry this young lady?"

"He did," Gregory was very positive.

"Uh-huh. Do yuh reckon Clark would go so far as to try and shoot Curley?"

"Meanin' that Clark sneaked up here to shoot Curley, and got beat at his game?"

"Not meanin'—just wonderin', Gregory."

"I don't know what Clark would do, Sheriff. But I don't think that Curley would kill him and run. He ain't that kind."

Skeeter rolled a cigaret, shaping it carefully. It gave him a chance to do a little silent wondering for himself.

"I don't understand about that imprint of a dollar," said Gregory.

"Experimentin', I reckon," said Skeeter. "I wish Curley would show up."

"You don't think he did it, do you?" asked Joy hopefully.

Skeeter smiled softly.

"I hope he didn't, Miss Joy. Yuh see, I'm doin' my darndest to think of somebody else that did do it. Whoever killed Mont Clark was here at the house, I think.

"Everythin' points to the fact that Monk Clark sneaked up here and somebody shot him through the shoulder. Monk draws his six-shooter, pulled back the hammer—and got a bullet right through his heart. I dunno what Monk Clark was doin' here. His horse is down there in the brush, two hundred yards away, which makes it look like Monk sneaked up here, lookin' for trouble."

"And he got it!" said Kaintuck emphatically.

"Yeah, he did. You go down and get Clark's horse, Kaintuck. We've got to pack the body to town."

"Want us to go with yuh?" asked Gregory.

"No-o-o-o, I don't think so. You folks ain't goin' to run away."

Kaintuck brought the horse, and the three men draped the body of Monk Clark across his own saddle, roping it securely.

"If you see Curley before I do, tell him to come down to see me right away," said Skeeter. "And don't talk to anybody about this. It sure looks awful bad right now, but there ain't nothin' as bad as it looks."

The two officers shook hands with Joy and Gregory.

"I'm awful glad you look at in the right way," said Joy. "I certainly went weak all over when I saw you coming."

"I'll bet yuh did. You knew yore father was goin' out to kill Monk Clark; so yuh went out to stop him, eh? I don't blame yuh for feelin' weak in the knees. Well, be good."

They rode away, leading the loaded horse, while Joy and her father mounted and headed for home.

"This shore is a funny deal," declared Kaintuck. "What's yore theory, Skeeter?"

"I'd hate to say. Here's how it looks. The Box X ranch-house has been used by them counterfeiters. They melted their stuff in the fireplace, and kept their tools under the bricks, in the hole.

"For some reason Monk Clark made a sneak over here and caught this feller removin' some of the stuff, or the tools. It looks as though this feller, knowin' that he's caught with the goods, starts shootin'. That's how it looks to me."

"But who was the feller?"

"My ——, you don't want to know much, do you?" exploded Skeeter.

"If it wasn't Curley Adams, what was Monk after him for?"

"How do I know?"

"You think that the counterfeiters had been usin' the old ranch-house as a place to make their bad money, and they wanted to get their stuff out before Curley discovered it?"

"That wouldn't be very hard to think, would it?"

"Nope. I'll bet this killin' will sure cause a lot of talk, Skeeter. Why, Monk Clark was our most prominent citizen."

"'S a funny old world, Kaintuck. Almost any jury would hang Hank Gregory for this. He started out to kill Monk Clark, yuh know. Admits it. Prob'ly sorry he didn't get a chance. If Curley killed him, I don't blame Curley."

"But yuh don't think he did, Skeeter?"

"I'm tryin' not to, yuh know. I sure hope Curley has been where folks can prove he wasn't at home at the time of the killin'."

"And if he can't?"

"Then I'm scared we'll have to put Curley in jail."

GREGORY and Joy were worried over the same thing as they rode back home. Neither of them believed that Curley had killed Clark; but could he prove it, they wondered?

Calamity met them at the stable, interested to know what had happened. Joy left her horse for Calamity to unsaddle and went to the house.

"Didja find Monk Clark, Hank?" queried Calamity.

Gregory hung up his saddle and turned to Calamity.

"Monk Clark is dead," he said shortly.

Calamity's mouth opened widely, but he did not speak. His eyes followed Gregory, who got some grain for the horses and threw in fresh straw for bedding. Calamity leaned against the wall and absently tested the teeth of a curry-comb on his chin.

"Did he put up much of a fight, Hank?" he asked softly.

"Didn't have much chance," said Gregory seriously. "One bullet hit him in the left shoulder and the other bored straight through his heart."

This was such a cold-blooded statement of facts that Calamity scratched his chin with the curry-comb. Then—

"Well, I hope yuh had a witness, Hank."

"Joy came just after I found him."

"After yuh—whatcha talkin' about?"

"He had already been killed, Calamity. Somebody shot him at the Box X just before I got there."

"The —— they did! Hank, you—"

Gregory shook his head.

"No, I didn't shoot him."

"Curley?"

"I don't know, Calamity. Curley wasn't there. The sheriff and his deputy showed up just after Joy got there. They took the body back to town."

"They did, eh? Well, I'll be darned! I remember a case back in 1866, when a feller shot—"

"You didn't see Curley since we left, did yuh?"

"Nope."

"I wish I knew where he is. If he can't prove where he was, he's up against a bad deal. Monk was killed right at a corner of the front porch; probably shot by somebody who was inside the house."

"My gosh! Do yuh reckon Curley done it, and then high-tailed it out of the country. Darn fool kid wouldn't stop to think that he could beat the case. I remember a feller back in—"

But Hank Gregory did not care to hear of something which had happened in 1866, and was going toward the house. Calamity grunted and followed in his wake.

Calamity said nothing, but went to work preparing supper, while Joy and her father sat on the porch and tried to cheer each other up. About an hour later Calamity announced supper.

"'Sall ready," he said. "I don't reckon there's much appetite around here though."

As they went back to the dining-room, Curley Adams rode up and dismounted. They were grouped together, staring at the front doorway, when he came in, rattling his spurs and whistling.

"Hello, everybody," he called. "Am I in time for supper? By golly, I sure am—" He hesitated and looked at them curiously. "Say, what's the matter with you folks, anyway?"

Joy went close to him and put her hands on his arms.

"Curley, where have you been today?" she asked softly.

resolved to do the only thing possible to avert a tragedy.

She ran through the kitchen and down to the stable, where she saddled her own horse, a hammer-headed roan that had little brains but plenty of speed. Calamity stood at a corner of the porch and watched her ride after her father.

He did not offer to assist nor interfere. Calamity was absolutely neutral. Nobody could ever accuse him of stopping a fight, and if one man wanted to kill another, it was no affair of Calamity's.

The hammer-headed roan was not the best riding horse in the country, and Joy was having difficulty in convincing it that she was its master. A liberal application of the quirt showed the roan that its ways were not liked, and after that it decided to do better.

She knew that her father would waste no time, but there was a possibility that he might stop at the Box X; so she swung further down the slopes, where it was possible to make better time.

Joy was a good rider—a good hill rider, which is some different than riding on the flat. She knew all the tricks of helping a horse over tough going, and as a result she was able to make time where an inexperienced rider would have hunted for an easier way around.

And never before did she have such an incentive for speed. She felt sure that she could convince her father of the folly of his intentions. Even if Monk Clark was guilty of an attempt to send Curley to the penitentiary, he had failed, she reasoned.

And it was Curley's battle, not her father's. She could not understand her father's sudden animosity toward Monk Clark, because they had always been friendly, as far as she knew. And while she commended her father's attitude in defense of the man she was to marry, she did not agree that he should commit murder for something which had not injured Curley.

She sent the roan scrambling over a ridge and galloped him straight down the brushy hill, where a slip might send horse and rider pin-wheeling to the rocky bottom. They hit the bottom in a cloud of dust and a shower of stones, but the roan gamely kept its feet and lurched into a gallop down the slope to Deer Creek.

She crossed Deer Creek near the old corral and continued straight north, intending to strike the Tin Cup road about two miles from the ranch, but when she reached the old road, which led east to the Box X, she hesitated. Something seemed to tell her to take this road.

"He might have stopped at the old ranch," she told herself, and turned in that direction. There was plenty of run left in the roan and it did not take her long to cover the mile to the Box X.

She could see a man near the ranch-house and a saddled horse stood between the house and the old stable. A closer inspection convinced her that the horse was the one her father had ridden from home.

She rode up beside the house and dismounted. Her father was standing just in front of the house, looking at something on the ground. He had seen her coming, but did not look up as she walked up to him.

LYING in front of him, half-hidden in the rank growth of foxtail grass, was Monk Clark, his sightless eyes staring at the sky. His right elbow was bent, and in his right hand was a cocked six-shooter. He had drawn the gun, cocked it, but died before he could pull the trigger.

Joy's face blanched at sight of him and she drew back, staring at her father.

She knew now that she had come too late. He had ridden faster than she had anticipated, and had met Monk Clark at the Box X. She looked down at him, a big hunk of lifeless clay, his jaw sagging. It seemed as though he might be yelling a battle cry, his gun lifted for a shot. She could not realize that Clark was dead.

She looked at her father, hardly able to tear her eyes away from the face of the dead man, and found him staring into space. His shoulders were bowed, as though bearing a great weight, and he seemed to have aged years in an hour.

A wild canary swung from a stunted bush near them and began singing. Joy turned and looked at the little yellow bird, wondering that anything could be happy now. She looked at Monk Clark and shuddered sickeningly. Her father spoke—

"How did yuh happen to follow me?" he asked softly.

"To try and stop you, Dad," she said hoarsely. "I heard what Calamity told you, and I—I knew why you came."

named Adams is going to have a lot of difficulty in provin' anything."

"Well," Gregory coughed softly, "you could make a getaway right now."

Curley shook his head.

"Nope. I can't afford to run. They may hang me, but they won't chase me."

"Oh, Curley, don't say things like that," begged Joy. "There must be a way out."

"Sure thing," smiled Curley. "Don't worry, Joy. Gosh, this will all come out in the wash."

"I'll go down with yuh," said Gregory slowly. "Somehow I've got quite a lot of faith in that sheriff. They said he didn't have any sense, but I think they're wrong."

"I'm going along, too," declared Joy. "I've got as much faith as any one else."

"I've got faith, too," said Calamity dryly. "I've also got a hunch—that I'll have to wash and wipe the dishes."

"I THOUGHT this shootin' was a mystery," said Kaintuck, after he and Skeeter had turned the body over to the local coroner, told their story, and escaped to their office.

"Ain't it?" asked Skeeter, relaxing indolently in an old chair, the back of which wailed a protest.

"It ain't. At least a dozen men offered to bet me that Curley killed him. Some of 'em offered big odds; so I reckon poor Curley is the favorite for the hangman stakes."

"When a prominent man is killed," said Skeeter slowly, "the crop of detectives is enormous. They all seem to think that Curley killed him because of that brandin' deal. And they're plumb willin' to believe that Curley tried to steal a Lazy H animal.

"Why, the darn fools are already makin' bets as to whether he gets a life sentence or gets hanged. You'd think that he had confessed, to hear some of 'em talkin'."

"Mebbe he did kill Monk Clark," said Kaintuck.

"Mebbe. There wouldn't be anything wonderful about it, if he did. As far back as history goes, men have killed each other, and they'll prob'ly keep on doin' it, Kaintuck. If Curley did kill him, I'll back him in a plea of self-defense.

"Monk Clark had no business in sneakin' up on the Box X. He died with a cocked gun in his hand. But there's somethin' else to this deal, pardner. Behind it is that counterfeitin' layout."

"Skeeter, do you think that Monk Clark was mixed up in it?"

"Hm-m-m. That's hard to say. I told Moran to come down here as soon as he could sneak away from the crowd."

A few minutes later Frank Moran came in and sat down with them.

"They're still millin' around the Half-Moon," stated Moran. "I don't know what will happen when the Tin Cup outfit hear that their boss is dead. What was it you wanted to talk about, Sheriff?"

Skeeter told him about the fireplace at the Box X and showed him the partly-made dollar.

"Clumsy job," declared Moran. "Looks like they had tried to make one in a plaster mold. Was there anything else in the fireplace?"

"Nope."

"I wonder," said Moran thoughtfully, "if Curley Adams is one of the gang?"

"You've been at the Tin Cup for quite a while, and you haven't found out anythin'."

"That's true, I'll admit that I'm stuck."

"Moran, did Monk Clark know that you was a detective?"

Moran nodded.

"Yeah, I told him. I had to do it, in order to have a chance to do my work."

"Ertle, too?"

"Yeah."

Skeeter smiled and shook his head.

"I don't *sabe* you fellers, Moran. Why in —— didn't yuh carry a banner?"

"What else could I do?" Moran almost lost his temper. "I had somethin' to do besides punchin' cows. Ranch owners don't pay cowpunchers to pesticate around the country, lookin' for clues."

"I beg yore pardon," said Skeeter seriously. "How long have you been with the Tin Cup outfit?"

"About a month."

"You was with the Lazy H quite a while, wasn't yuh?"

"Several months. What difference does it make how long I've been here? These cases sometimes take a year to settle up."

"Hadn't ought to, Moran."

"No?" Moran got to his feet. "Well, if you're so —— smart, go ahead and settle it. If you was any kind of a sheriff you'd have Curley Adams behind the bars right now."

Moran walked across the room, turning

his back on the sheriff, and began scanning a number of reward notices which had been pasted on the wall in lieu of wall-paper. There was no doubt that Moran was angry. Kaintuck squinted at Skeeter, his ill-fitting mustaches jerking with mirth.

Skeeter drummed on the table with his fingers and silently contemplated Moran's back. He had deliberately angered the detective, and it amused him. Moran shifted and began reading another notice, when Skeeter spoke apologetically—

"Aw-w-w-w-w, yuh don't need to get sore."

"No? Well, I'm tired of havin' you tryin' to tell me what to do all the time; *sabe?* I'll run my end of this, Sheriff."

Moran turned and stalked out of the office, while Skeeter grinned at Kaintuck.

"He got mad at yuh," said Kaintuck.

"Yeah, he did. Li'l son-of-a-gun. I go ahead and find all kinds of clues for him—and he gets mad at me. Ho-o-o, hum! It seems like yuh can't please everybody."

Kaintuck went to the Half-Moon, to see what the sentiment might be, while Skeeter smoked innumerable cigarets and made queer figures on a piece of paper with a stubby pencil.

Finally he nodded to himself and wrote a telegram, which read—

MORAN NEEDS YOU. COME AS FAST AS YOU CAN.

He signed it—

SARG, sheriff of Moon River.

Skeeter walked out of the office and stood on the edge of the sidewalk, debating just what to do. He had always followed what gamblers called a hunch, and just now he had a big hunch.

The yellow lights from the windows and open door of the Half-Moon saloon flooded half of the street, and from within the place came the dull hum of conversation. The glow illuminated a part of the hitch-rack, high-lighting the string of saddle horses.

A wagon came creaking up the street and drew up in front of a store, where the driver dismounted from the wagon and was greeted by several men who had been sitting on the edge of the board sidewalk. Somewhere a guitar novice essayed the "Spanish Fandango," but without success.

Skeeter leaned against a porch-post, his mind far away from the sights and sounds of Crescent City. He was seeing a pale-faced girl, with frightened eyes, who clung to the arm of a man, whose face was twisted with apprehension. And on the ground was the body of Monk Clark, staring up at the sky.

Skeeter tried to segregate the facts as he had seen them. Some one had been in that house when Monk Clark approached, and Clark had known that this man was there. That much, Skeeter Bill felt must be true. Else why would Clark tie his horse far from the house and approach it on foot?

"What was he lookin' for?" muttered Skeeter to himself. "Was he sneakin' up on Curley Adams? Did Curley kill him, try to dispose of the body, and get frightened at the approach of Hank Gregory?"

It looked reasonable. Skeeter shook his head, as his mind flashed back to the skeleton hanging in the tree; the fleshless skull which grinned blankly at the hills.

Where was the connection, he wondered? But try as he might, he could not connect Curley Adams with the killing. For some unknown reason it was impossible—as impossible as to think that Curley Adams, a normal thinking person, would deliberately vent the Lazy H brand, knowing that the Lazy H was the only outfit to brand that particular spot, and run on his own iron.

"I've got to find the answer for myself," he decided. "I may not be a good detective, but I've got the nerve to play out the only hand they'll deal me."

HE SHOVED away from the post and walked slowly to the depot, two blocks away. The agent greeted him pleasantly, as Skeeter produced the telegram he had written. The agent scanned it quickly and looked up at Skeeter.

"United States Marshal, eh? Say, I've got a telegram for Moran from Long. Just came in. Maybe this will cover your wire."

He handed Skeeter the telegram, sent to Frank Moran, which read—

WILL ARRIVE CRESCENT CITY TOMORROW TO TAKE CHARGE OF INVESTIGATION. (Signed) LONG.

"That's fine," nodded Skeeter. "Cancel my wire. I'll give this to Moran, if yuh want me to."

"Is he in town?"

"Yeah."

"All right, it will save me the trouble. Thanks."

Skeeter pocketed the telegram and walked outside. Far down the tracks sounded the eerie whistle of a locomotive, as a freight train rumbled its way toward Crescent City. Skeeter paused. The rails were humming now and the beams from the locomotive headlight illuminated the rails down the tracks.

But Skeeter Bill was not seeing this. A sudden inspiration seemed to strike him, and he made a queer little noise with his lips, a sucking whistle. Then he turned on his heel and went back to the door of the depot, meeting the agent, who was coming out, carrying a lantern.

"What time is the passenger due through here?" he asked.

"Eleven o'clock."

"That's what I thought, but I wanted to be sure. Is it always on time?"

The agent laughed and shifted his lantern.

"Not always, Sheriff. In fact, it is seldom on time, but not very late."

"Thanks."

The freight roared in, as Skeeter walked from the platform and headed back toward the office, deep in thought.

"If it works I'm a dinger—if it don't I'm a sucker," he decided.

He looked up as he neared the office door. Joy, Curley and Hank Gregory were standing there, waiting for him. He came up, opened the door silently and let them in, after which he locked the door and smiled at Curley.

"Well," said Curley, "what's the verdict, Sheriff?"

Skeeter grinned softly and shook his head. "I dunno, pardner. The jury is over in the Half-Moon, and Kaintuck is feelin' their pulse right now. Set down, folks."

He placed some chairs for them and sat down on his desk.

"I haven't any alibi," said Curley. "While this was goin' on I was over at San Gregario cañon tryin' to buy lumber."

"Thasso? Didja buy any?"

"Wasn't anybody there to buy it from."

Skeeter hugged one knee and squinted at the floor, while Joy watched him anxiously.

"How did the town take the news?" Thus Gregory nervously.

"The sober ones—calmly; drunken ones—as usual. Whisky sure puts a rope in a man's hand. The Tin Cup outfit don't know it yet, except Frank Moran."

"I suppose he'd like to hang me," smiled Curley. "Yuh remember I hit him a short time ago."

Skeeter nodded quickly. "Yeah, I remember. Still, I hope he wouldn't want to hang yuh for that."

"They'll probably say that I killed Monk Clark over that brandin' deal," said Curley. "But the fact of the matter is, I never knew a darned thing about it until the folks told me about it a while ago.

"I haven't been to town for a couple of days, and no one has been at the ranch to tell me how close I came to being sent up for rustlin'."

"I know," Skeeter nodded slowly. "Me and Kaintuck was goin' over to have a talk with yuh, when we ran in to this deal."

"But who balled up the deal for Monk Clark?" wondered Curley. "Somebody sure saved my bacon, and I don't know who would do a thing like that for me."

"A feller never knows who his friends are," said Skeeter. "Me and Kaintuck showed up at the corral just after Ertle had pulled out, and we sure had some fun with Clark."

Joy got to her feet and went close to Skeeter.

She stepped in front of him, looking at him intently, but he shifted his eyes, deliberately avoiding her. Curley looked at her, wondering what she was trying to do. Skeeter shifted around to Curley, but she stepped between them, facing Skeeter.

"Aw-w-w gosh!" grunted Skeeter uncomfortably.

"Look me in the eyes," she dared him.

Skeeter tried to do it, but one eye shut tightly and he grinned foolishly.

"Wasn't that a queer thing for a sheriff to do?" Softly.

"What?" asked Skeeter. "Look at a girl with one eye?"

"No—to ruin evidence."

"Well," Skeeter avoided her eyes, "yuh see, the county only allows us thirty-five cents a day to feed prisoners, and we just can't do it on that money."

Skeeter did not look up at her. He finished his statement, reached in his pocket for his tobacco and papers and began rolling a cigaret. Joy turned her head and looked at Curley, tears glistening in her eyes.

"Don't you understand, Curley," she whispered. "He was the one who—"

"Joy, do you mean that the sheriff vented

those brands?" Curley got out of his chair and came to Skeeter, but before he could speak again, the door opened and Kaintuck came in. He was breathing heavily, and did not seem surprized to see Curley and the Gregory family.

"The Tin Cup and the Lazy H outfits are both here now," he said. "I got all the dope I could before I left. They're goin' to the Box X first, and if Curley ain't there they'll go to the HG. Them —— fools won't even wait for a trial."

"They'll see that black horse of mine at the hitch-rack!" exclaimed Curley. "Everybody knows that black horse."

"A black, roan and a gray?" asked Kaintuck.

"Yes. Joy rode the roan and—"

"That's what I thought," grinned Kaintuck. "I've got all three of 'em tied behind the office, where nobody will see 'em."

"Oh, that is wonderful!" Joy almost hugged Kaintuck, much to his embarrassment.

"But it don't end yet," said Skeeter. "We'll put Adams' horse in our stable, and Gregory and Miss Joy better fog for home. Be there when the posse of lynchers show up. They won't hurt any of you folks. You don't know where Curley is, and the last place they'd ever look is right here."

"But you're not going to put him in jail, are you?" Thus Joy fearfully.

"He'll have to sleep in a cell," grinned Skeeter. "The doggoned cots are fastened to the wall. But I'll promise to not lock the door."

"We'll be traveling, Joy," urged her father. "As soon as the men ride toward the Box X, we'll go home. Good-by, Curley."

Skeeter urged Kaintuck and Gregory toward the rear door, while Joy told Curley good-by, and in a moment she joined them. They mounted their horses, circled the town and rode back toward home. There was no moon as yet; so there was little danger of them being seen by the men who were heading for the Box X.

The three men went back in the office. Skeeter was careful to lock the doors and pull down the blinds. Crescent City might prove a dangerous place for Curley Adams, and Skeeter knew that the jail was none too capable of withstanding an assault.

"It kinda looks as though I was up against it," observed Curley. "I'd hate to be hung for somethin' I didn't do—but I can't prove I didn't. Everybody probably knows that Monk Clark found a yearlin' belongin' to the Lazy H, with my brand on its shoulder; and they'd accept that as a reason for me to kill him."

"Reasons don't make much difference to a mob," said Skeeter. "I want you to answer a few questions, Adams. It's yore own business, and yuh don't have to answer, yuh know."

"I'll answer 'em if I can, Sheriff. I'm not forgettin' that you saved me from a rustlin' charge."

"Well, you ain't obligated to answer these questions. What kind of a six-gun do you use?"

CURLEY drew out his gun and handed it to Skeeter. It was a Colt .41, single-action. Skeeter glanced at it and handed it back.

"Didja ever reload any shells, Adams?"

"Yeah. I've got a reloadin' set out at the ranch. It costs a lot to buy shells, and I like to experiment."

"Uh-huh. What didja find out with yore experiments?"

Curley smiled softly.

"I found out that my loads were not as good as the factory loaded article."

"Yeah? Adams, did you ever mould a silver bullet and load it in a shell?"

"I did," Curley answered quickly, making no effort to evade the question. "I was mouldin' some bullets one night and wondered how silver would shoot; so I melted a dollar and made me one."

"How did it shoot?"

"I don't know. It sure made a pretty bullet. I loaded it in my gun, but never got a chance to shoot it. The next day I was taken sick. Yuh see, I was in bed for a week or so, and when I got back on my feet I plumb forgot that bullet. Later on I missed it, and I thought that some of the boys had swiped it."

"Thought some of the boys had swiped it, eh?"

Curley squinted at the floor, pondering the question. He was a good, clean-looking sort of a fellow; not at all the sort of a person who would shoot from ambush. Skeeter eyed him closely. Finally Curley lifted his head.

"What I don't understand is how you found out about that bullet, Sheriff. I

made it quite a while ago, and I'd forgotten about it. What's this all about—what are you trying to find out about that silver bullet for?"

"Who knew you had moulded it?"

Curley scratched his head thoughtfully.

"I dunno. Mebbe I never did tell anybody about it. Come to think of it, I didn't tell any of the boys. That's kinda funny, too. I remember of puttin' it in one chamber of my gun, but I don't remember of takin' it out."

"Where was yore gun when you were sick?"

"Hangin' up in the bunk-house. Say, how did you know about that silver bullet?"

"I'm a mind reader," grinned Skeeter. "How long ago was it that you was sick?"

"About a month ago."

"Did Gregory tell yuh about what we found in yore ranch-house today?"

"He told me about the fire-place bein' dug up, and that yuh found where somebody had tried to make a dollar."

"What do yuh think of it?"

"No idea. It sure wasn't that way when I left home."

"I reckon the questions are ended," smiled Skeeter.

"Did I answer 'em to yore satisfaction, Sheriff?"

Skeeter nodded.

"Yeah, I reckon so. Don't mention that bullet to anybody."

"Do you know what became of it?"

Skeeter took the bullet from his pocket and handed it to Curley, who looked it over carefully.

"It's been shot," he said wonderingly. "Was—was that one of the bullets in Monk Clark?"

"Nope."

"Where did you find it, Sheriff?"

"I'll let yuh know some day," Skeeter took the bullet and dropped it in his pocket. "Me and Kaintuck are goin' over to the Half-Moon to listen to things, Adams. You lock the door and keep out of sight."

"Anythin' you say, Sheriff. Yo're sure treatin' me white."

"Well, you ain't done nothin' wrong, have yuh? C'mon, Kaintuck."

Curley locked the door behind them and they crossed to the Half-Moon. The killing of Monk Clark had made good business in the Half-Moon, and whisky-feeling ran high. Men who had no use for Monk Clark when he was alive clamored for a chance to pull a rope on the man who killed him.

They were all waiting anxiously for the return of the six men who had ridden to the Box X, Jim Searles, Clark's foreman, Charley Ames and Sol Asher, of the Tin Cup, Sam Ertle, Frisco Larkin and Van Cleve, of the Lazy H.

There had evidently been plenty of criticism against the sheriff's office, as the conversation lulled at the entrance of Skeeter and Kaintuck. Moran was at the bar, drinking with several men, and Skeeter noticed that Belden and Stanfield, the owners of the Silver Bell mine, were also there.

Several roughly-dressed men were at the bar or playing the games, and Skeeter decided that they were men from the mines. Moran joined Skeeter a little later and told him that the Silver Bell had closed down.

"That's Rugg, the superintendent, over there playin' poker," said Moran, pointing at a big man, slouched in a chair. Rugg was not a pleasant looking person. His heavy cheeks were covered with a week's growth of stiff, black whiskers, and a heavy mustache partly covered his thick lips.

"I'll bet that jigger never drank milk when he was a baby," said Kaintuck. "If a rattlesnake ever bit him the snake would get py-o-ree."

Moran laughed and turned the subject to Monk Clark.

"YOU knew that some of the boys have gone out to find Curley Adams, didn't yuh?" asked Moran.

"Nobody told me," Skeeter shook his head. "What do yuh reckon they aim to do with him?"

It was such a foolish question that Moran wondered if the sheriff could be joking.

"They think Curley killed Clark," said Moran.

"Thasso? Don't any of 'em *know* he did, do they?"

"I don't suppose they do. But—"

"There yuh are. Nothin' to prove he did it. Don'tcha think they're a little previous?"

Moran laughed shortly. He could not understand Skeeter Bill. It was rather unusual for a sheriff to remain inactive, while a posse of men were going out with deliberate intent to hang a man.

"Bein' previous won't help Adams, if they find him," said Moran meaningly.

"Prob'ly not." Skeeter nodded slowly. "Who's leadin' the bunch?"

"Jim Searles."

"Good man, I reckon. I don't know him very well, but he looks like a man who would have a little judgment."

"Charley Ames and Sol Asher went along," offered Moran. "Ertle, Frisco Larkin and Van Cleve made up the rest of the party. Only six of 'em all together."

"Ought to be enough," smiled Skeeter. "Three from the Tin Cup and three from the Lazy H."

"You don't seem much interested, Sheriff."

"It's none of my business, if six —— fools want to run their own horses ragged in the dark, is it?"

"Oh, I see—" Moran nodded understandingly.

It had suddenly occurred to him that Skeeter was indifferent because he knew that these men would not find Curley Adams.

Moran drifted 'over to a roulette game, and Skeeter met Belden at the bar.

"I just heard that the Silver Bell mine had closed down," said Skeeter, by way of starting conversation. Belden nodded quickly and invited Skeeter to partake of his hospitality.

"Yes, we decided to close down, at least temporarily. Silver is pretty low just now, and so we will cease production for a while. You see, we have been hit pretty hard lately."

"Yuh sure have," Skeeter nodded thoughtfully. "We never got much of a chance to trail that cargo of silver. They muffled their pack-horses' hoofs, follered that old game-trail to where it spread out, and then we didn't have a ghost of a chance to trail 'em."

"I was afraid of it, Sheriff. Of course it will be impossible for them to move any great quantity of silver from this valley. Every exit is being watched, of course, but they may lie low and tire us out."

Skeeter made no comment. He felt that the men who had taken the silver would never attempt to move it, except as silver coin. While Skeeter and Belden discussed the stolen silver, Doctor Skeen, the coroner, came in.

Skeen was a small, gray-haired, spectacled man, retiring and soft-spoken. He excused himself to Belden and drew Skeeter aside to give him two badly-battered bullets.

"These were from Monk Clark's body," he explained. "I had an idea that you might care to look them over."

They were unmistakably of .45 caliber. Skeeter examined them closely, but they told him nothing.

"I put a pair of calipers on the butt of that least battered one, and it seems to measure the same as a .45," stated the doctor. "I can weigh them, if you wish."

"No need of it, Doc. They're forty-fives. How about holdin' the inquest tomorrow?"

"I was going to suggest it, Sheriff. Will you get in touch with Gregory and his daughter? We will need their testimony."

"I'll get 'em."

Doctor Skeen thanked him and went away. Skeeter showed Kaintuck the bullets.

"It sure is a good thing for Curley that these ain't .41's," said Kaintuck. "But it makes things tough for us. Most everybody shoots a .45, except Curley and Frisco Larkin—and I've still got Frisco's gun."

The presence of Skeeter and Kaintuck had served to still the conversation regarding Monk Clark's death, and every one seemed to be anxiously awaiting the return of the six riders.

IT WAS almost midnight when they came back. Ertle and Jim Searles strode in to the Half-Moon and went straight to the bar, where Kaintuck and Skeeter were trying to out-guess a nickel-in-the-slot machine.

Jim Searles, foreman of the Tin Cup, was ordinarily a big, good-natured cowboy, with a ready smile, but just now the smiling good-nature was missing. He strode up to the bar, his spurs rasping harshly, while behind him came Ertle, his thin face set in a thoughtful frown.

Skeeter turned and spoke to the two men.

"Did yuh find yore man?" asked one of the players at the faro layout anxiously, looking from Ertle to the sheriff.

"We got a man all right," growled Ertle, and then to Skeeter, "We've got Hank Gregory out there, Sheriff."

"Hank Gregory? What have yuh got him for?" asked Skeeter.

"Thasall right," growled Searles. "Lot of things you don't know."

Skeeter was trying to puzzle out why they should bring Hank Gregory back with them, when Doctor Skeen came in again. He had an envelope in his hand, but hesitated, realizing that he had interrupted a debate.

"Pardon me," he said quickly. "In Monk Clark's pocket I found this letter, which he had evidently intended to post. It is addressed to Henry Gregory."

"To Gregory?" blurted Searles. "Lemme see it."

"It's sealed," said Skeeter, making a guess that such was the case. "You open that letter—"

But Searles had already taken it from the doctor and ripped off the envelope, while Ertle and Van Cleve stepped in front of Skeeter, blocking him from interference.

Searles laughed harshly as he scanned the letter, and turned to the crowd.

"Listen to this, boys," he lowered the letter for a moment.

"I've worked for Monk Clark a long time, and the other day he said somethin' about bein' afraid of Hank Gregory. It seemed funny for Monk to be afraid of anybody; so I asked him about it. He didn't want to tell me much about it, but he did say that he had the goods on Gregory for a killin' ten years ago.

"Gregory knew that Clark had this deadwood on him, and Clark was afraid that Gregory might—well, you know how it would feel to have somethin' like that hangin' over yuh. So, when this death came up, I remembered what Monk said, and tonight we decided that Gregory knew more about this deal than he was willin' to tell.

"Now here's what this letter says:

"Dear Hank:

"Just to let you know that I had nothing to do with the misbranding of that Lazy H heifer. I don't know who did it, and I don't care a ——. I want you to understand that I won't stoop to petty larceny to make you see things the way I want you to see them, even if I could send you up for killing the Badger County sheriff ten years ago. I am writing this to explain things, because I refuse to make a fool of myself by coming to your ranch again.

"Respectfully,

"(Signed) Monk Clark."

Searles finished reading and scanned the crowd, which were already buzzing with amazement. Skeeter was shocked. Perhaps Gregory was the one who killed Clark, he thought. Gregory was the one who had discovered the body.

If he had met Clark at the Box X and killed him, the first thing he would do would be to hide the body. And he admitted that he started out to kill Clark. Skeeter squinted at Searles and Ertle, but made no comment.

"I reckon the sheriff can see why we brought him in now," smiled Searles. "This letter cinches a reason for the killin'."

Skeeter nodded quickly.

"Looks thataway, boys. I'll lock him up."

One of the cowboys laughed softly. "Lock him up, eh? That's real kind of yuh."

Skeeter did not turn his head, but spoke directly to Searles.

"You didn't have any idea, except to lock him up, did yuh?"

Searles hesitated. He was known among the cowboys as a square-shooter, sober and industrious; not one whose judgment might be easily warped. Then he shook his head.

"You can have him, Sheriff. If he killed Monk Clark, he will get a square trial. This evidence looks pretty strong to us, but the law might tear —— out of it in a courtroom. We all liked Monk, I reckon. He had his faults, just like we all have. If he was murdered I want to see the murderer punished—but I don't want to see an innocent man hanged."

It was rather a long speech for Searles to make, but it was spoken so sincerely that it silenced those who were for immediate action. Skeeter walked outside, where he found the rest of the crowd with Gregory.

"Let the sheriff have him," ordered Searles. "We'll see that Gregory has a fair trial."

"What was it about that letter?" asked Van Cleve.

Searles told him what Monk Clark had written.

"And you turn him over to the law, after that?" fleered Van Cleve. "Yo're sure gettin' easy, Jim."

"That'll be about all from you," said Searles coldly.

Skeeter touched Gregory on the arm and they walked to the office together. Gregory had nothing to say. It seemed as if the ghost of Monk Clark had risen from the grave to point an accusing finger at him and

tell the world of that mistake of ten years ago.

Curley unlocked the door for them and listened with amazement while Skeeter told him what had happened.

"But where is Joy?" asked Curley anxiously.

"Home," said Gregory wearily. "She doesn't even know about it. She had gone to bed when they came. I heard a noise in the yard, and when I went out they stuck a gun in my face and made me come with them. Calamity doesn't know it, either."

"Well, this sure is a mess," declared Curley. "You didn't kill him."

"No, I didn't, Curley."

"How much truth was in that letter, Gregory?" asked Skeeter.

"It was all true, Sheriff," said Gregory, and told Skeeter all about the incident.

"And Monk Clark held this over yuh, eh?"

"Not until a short time ago. He wanted Joy. Up to that time he never mentioned the killin'. Maybe he thought he could force me to stop the marriage between Joy and Curley. I told him enough for him to know that I wouldn't be blackmailed.

"And when I found out about that misbranded yearlin', I was sure that it was Clark's first move to get rid of Curley, and I wanted a showdown with him. Yeah, I was goin' to kill him, and I won't deny it."

"But Joy is of age," said Curley. "You couldn't do anythin'."

"I told him that, Curley."

"Well, I dunno just what to do," said Skeeter. "I've got to put yuh in a cell, I reckon. I don't want to do it, but I told 'em I'd take charge of yuh. Mebbe you'd be safer there than runnin' loose. And then I better send Kaintuck out to tell Joy and Calamity, 'cause they might worry."

"Why not let me go?" asked Curley. "I can make a sneak out of here and come back without any one knowing it."

"Well, all right," said Skeeter. "You'll sure have to be careful. The town is full of folks, lookin' for excitement."

Curley lost no time in making his sneak. He went carefully out to the stable, mounted his horse and rode away. Skeeter kept a close watch until Curley was well on his way. He could hear the noise from the Half-Moon, and knew that the crowd would stay in anticipation of the inquest. It was not often that Crescent City furnished as interesting a subject as it now had.

Skeeter went back in the office and barred the rear door. The jail was part of the office, and Skeeter wondered how long it would take a mob to tear it all apart. Moon River sheriffs had always depended more upon Winchester rifles and sawed-off shotguns for defense than thickness of wall.

"Did he get away all right?" asked Gregory, looking out between the bars of his cell door.

"Started all right," replied Skeeter.

"That's good. Sheriff, I'm sure up against a bad deal. Even if I could prove that I didn't kill Monk Clark, there's that Badger county deal to look forward to."

"Yeah, that's true, Gregory. But yuh might be able to prove yore story on that. I believe yuh, and when I believe anythin' it must sound like the truth. Just set easy, pardner, and stick to yore story. Mebbe somethin' will bust pretty soon."

Skeeter walked to the front of the office and was greeted with a sharp rap on the door. There was nothing for him to conceal now, so he opened the door to see Ertle, Frisco, Sol Asher and Charley Ames.

Frisco and Ames were in front, both of them covering Skeeter with their six-shooters.

Skeeter did not put up his hands, nor did they ask him to do so. Frisco Larkin leered at Skeeter, and Skeeter had a sudden great desire to hit him square in the front teeth, which bulged out badly, causing Frisco to appear continually trying to close his lips.

Ertle was grinning with his mouth, but his keen eyes were watching every movement of the sheriff, and it seemed to Skeeter that Ertle would like to have him try to draw his gun. Skeeter did not pay any attention to Sol Asher and Charley Ames, who seemed nervous.

"We're comin' in," stated Ames.

They had all been drinking and were odorous with liquor.

"Come in," invited Skeeter, stepping aside. Ames kept him covered, while the others searched the place.

"You had Curley Adams here," stated Ertle disgustedly.

"Did I?" Skeeter smiled. "That's sure remarkable, Ertle. Yuh can see for yourself, can'tcha."

"He ain't here now," declared Asher angrily.

"Yore eyesight is plumb remarkable," said Skeeter admiringly.

"What I don't *sabe* is this: You've got Gregory behind the bars for killin' Clark, and now yuh want Curley. How many men does it take to kill one?"

"Difference of opinion is what makes horse races," replied Ertle. "Some of us don't think Gregory done the job, and we don't want to make any mistakes."

"Why don'tcha arrest everybody in the county? You whip-poor-wills make me tired. If yo're through searchin' my place, yuh might move out."

Ames had holstered his gun, as had the others. It was evident that they had been misinformed.

"You might apologize for this intrusion," said Skeeter. "A sheriff don't appreciate havin' a gun stuck in his face, while a bunch of drunks search his office and jail."

"Well, for ——'s sake!" sneered Frisco. "When I apologize to you, they'll be skatin' in ——!"

Ertle was between Skeeter and Frisco, but before he could shift his position Skeeter had back-heeled him, sending him reeling toward the door. Frisco reached for his gun, leaving Skeeter a wide-open chance to drive his left fist straight in to Frisco's jaw.

It was what was known in ring parlance as a "haymaker." Skeeter's fist started from behind his hip, described part of an arc and met its object just as Frisco's hand lifted the gun from its holster.

It was all done quickly. Ertle was still clawing for balance when Frisco was falling backwards across a chair, where he went to sleep with his boots in the air.

Skeeter whirled with his back to the wall, his six-shooter jammed against his hip, as he waited for the next move. Ertle had fallen to his knees, but now he got up and swore softly.

"Vamoose," said Skeeter softly. "And next time yuh feel like gettin' tough with me—hop to it."

But none of them accepted the challenge. Ertle rubbed his knees and swore bitterly, his eyes fixed on Skeeter's gun. But Asher and Ames were only too glad to call it quits and get out of there. Asher slowly slid his gun back in its holster, cleared his throat softly.

"Well, I—I reckon that's all," he said foolishly. "Curley sure ain't nowhere around here, gents."

The three men filed silently out, leaving Frisco still in slumberland, with his boot-heels pointing toward the ceiling. Skeeter grinned and considered Frisco. It was an interesting sight.

Gregory was questioning Skeeter, trying to find out what had happened. The bars of his cell door were facing another cell, and he could only hear what was going on.

"Nothin' much," laughed Skeeter. "I tripped Ertle and hit Frisco Larkin."

Frisco was showing signs of returning consciousness; so Skeeter took his gun, dragged him in to a cell and locked the door.

"I'll keep him for disturbin' the peace," grinned Skeeter. "There is a law of that kind, Gregory, but it ain't never been used in this country."

KAINTUCK came in, all out of breath. The three men had gone to the Half-Moon and told their experience.

"Gosh dang it!" wailed Kaintuck. "I missed all the fun. Where is Frisco?"

"In a cell."

"Gosh! What for?"

"Disturbin' my peace. I'm goin' to keep him a while, too."

"Can yuh do that, Skeeter?"

"I reckon I can. You go back and keep yore ears open. Curley has gone out to the Gregory ranch to tell Joy and Calamity what has happened."

Kaintuck hurried out, and Skeeter locked the door. He was glad that Curley had gone to the ranch, because it was hard to tell what might have happened if he had been there when the four men came in.

Skeeter sat down at his desk and rolled a smoke, a half grin on his lips. Things were working out for him—giving him an advantage he had not expected. If he could keep Curley safe until the big play was made; that would be the rub. There was grave danger if the whisky-drinking element caught Curley.

He could hear them over in the Half-Moon—laughter, talking, bursts of raucous song. Kaintuck was over there, keeping his finger on the pulse of the situation. Skeeter knew that Joy and Calamity would come back with Curley, and he wondered how Joy would take the bad news.

"That poor kid sure is gettin' a lot of jolts," he decided. "The crowd ain't decided yet which one is guilty—Curley or

Hank—and they'd be willin' to hang 'em both so as to be sure."

He got to his feet and walked the length of the office. He wanted action. There were certain things to be tried out, and he did not want to wait. His lips twisted in an anxious smile, as he stopped near the door, his eyes half-closed, speculating. Then he laughed softly and shook his head.

"Hang on to yoreself," he muttered. "The pot is on the table and you've got 'em beat in sight. Bluff, you son-of-a-gun! Get out on a limb. If they don't saw it off between you and the tree, yo're settin' easy."

Frisco was swearing in his cell and demanding that he be released. Skeeter went to the door and looked in at him.

"What in —— am I in here for?" asked Frisco.

"For disturbin' the peace."

"Aw-w-w, ——!"

"Well, we'll keep yuh in there anyway. Now what do yuh think of that, Frisco?"

"I think you'll be —— sorry when I get out."

"And I think you'll be —— glad," said Skeeter, walking away.

"Hey! Whatcha mean by that?" demanded Frisco.

But Skeeter did not say. He had flung himself down on a cot and was building himself a cigaret, a grin on his lips.

IT WAS a hectic night in Crescent City. Several fights were started in the Half-Moon and whisky flowed freely. But the cold gray dawn, which was not cold at all, but very hot, came creeping along to find a lot of tired, sleepy-eyed folks, whose stomachs were totally unfit for food, voices hoarse and heads heavy.

The majority of them did not care a whoop who got hanged for murder. In fact several of them had forgotten everything about it. They growled at each other, spat disgustedly and had more drinks. Sam Rugg went about like a sore-headed grizzly, looking for trouble.

And he found it in the person of old Calamity, who was also looking for trouble. Joy and Calamity had ridden back to town with Curley, just ahead of daybreak. Joy had stayed at the sheriff's office with her father and Curley, but old Calamity wanted action.

He had listened to Gregory's confession to Joy, the story of which had already been told by Curley, and swore that Hank Gregory was a —— liar. Old Calamity was on the war-path. He wore two guns and a new pair of boots. The boots hurt his feet.

Skeeter advised Calamity to stay with them, and his advice was echoed by Gregory and Joy, but Calamity swore under his breath and said he was of age and would do as he pleased.

So he went out on the street, limping slightly, and looked for what he might devour. Several of the cowboys looked old Calamity over and decided that they did not want any of his medicine.

Not so Sam Rugg. He was still strangling over a drink of raw liquor, as he lurched out of the Half-Moon and almost fell over Calamity. Liquor had ruined Rugg's perspective. He looked upon the old man as legitimate prey.

"C'mere!" he snorted as he grasped old Calamity by the arm and whirled him around, pinning him against the saloon wall.

"Unpaw me!" snapped Calamity. "Who do yuh think yo're tryin' to maul, yuh big polecat?"

Rugg slapped a big hand over Calamity's mouth, rubbing heavily on Calamity's nose. That was the last straw. One of the new boots snapped up in a short kick and connected with Rugg's knee-cap.

Rugg immediately forgot everything, except the sharp pain in his knee. He dropped both hands to the injured spot, bumping against Calamity, who whipped out a gun, swung it sidewise and rapped Rugg sharply on the head.

Rugg forgot about his knee and went down in a limp heap. Calamity stepped over him, felt tenderly of his sore nose, and looked around for more worlds to conquer. Several men had crowded out of the saloon door, goggling at Calamity.

"Pistol-whipped him," said Calamity. "Yeah, and I'll pistol-whip some more of yuh if yuh monkey with me. I ain't no dad-durned bluffer. I was killin' men when you fellers was wearin' didies—and I ain't forgot how."

"Nobody goin' to bother yuh, Calamity," assured Asher.

"That's what I 'lowed when I driv up. I ain't safe. In my state of mind I'm liable to be plumb ignorant of humanity. I crave to meet the men who came out and took Hank Gregory. I ain't very big and I'm

gettin' old, but by the mighty, muddy Missouri, I can whip any one, or all six, of the men who came out there last night."

"Thasall right, old-timer," said another half-drunk cowboy. "You jist go ahead and have a good time. Nobody is goin' to choose you. But I'd advise yuh to look out for Sam Rugg."

"This half-witted bug-hunter?" Calamity pointed at Rugg, who was resting on one elbow, rubbing his head. "Huh!" Calamity snorted his disdain. "If he monkeys with me I'll squirsh him."

No one seemed to disagree with Calamity; so he crossed the street, while some of the men assisted Rugg to his feet and took him back in the saloon, where they explained what had happened.

Rugg drank several more glasses of liquor to try and deaden the pain in his knee and head. It was humiliating, to say the least.

"Better leave him alone," advised Moran, who had drunk but little during the night.

"The —— I had!" Rugg shook his head angrily.

"All right," Moran shrugged his shoulders. "Calamity will shoot next time."

"I'll get me a gun."

"You better get yuh an army. That old jigger has forgotten more about gun fighting than you'll ever learn—and he hasn't forgotten the part that beats the other feller to the first shot."

Ertle joined in the argument, trying to convince Rugg that his best course was to forget old Calamity. Then Ertle drew Moran aside.

"Say, do you know that Frisco is still in jail?"

"I wondered where he was," laughed Moran.

"What's so funny about it? That —— sheriff knocked Frisco out and drove us all outside. I've been tryin' to find out why he locked Frisco up."

"Didja ask the sheriff?"

"No. I thought mebbe some of you fellers had heard."

"It's the first time I heard about it, Ertle. Mebbe he had an idea that Frisco needed soberin' up."

"Aw, he wasn't that drunk. I'm goin' to look into this, I'll tell yuh that. He ain't got no right to lock a man in jail for bein' drunk."

"Not unless he gets too bad," amended Moran. "He'll probably let him loose pretty soon. I'd sure like to know what became of Curley Adams."

"Well, he wasn't in the jail last night, that's a cinch."

Ertle left Moran and came down to the jail. Skeeter stepped outside the office to talk with Ertle, not wishing to have him come inside, but Ertle caught a glimpse of the interior and of Curley Adams.

"I wanted to ask yuh about Frisco," said Ertle.

"Well, he's doin' as well as can be expected," said Skeeter seriously. "Of course he's still runnin' off at the vocal cords a little."

"He is, eh?" Ertle spat angrily. "Just what in —— are you keepin' him in jail for?"

" 'Cause he's a bad boy, Ertle. If he was loose I'd have to kill him sooner or later."

"The —— yuh would! Just because he talked back to yuh, eh?"

"Mebbe."

"Then yuh won't turn him loose, eh?"

"Nope."

"Yo're takin' a lot on yourself, Sheriff. I'll see that yuh do turn him loose. By ——, I'll go to Judge Grayson and see if you've got any right to keep one of my men in jail, when he ain't done anythin'."

"Tell the judge hello for me, will yuh, Ertle?"

"You go to ——!"

Ertle whirled on his heel and went up the street, carrying his hat in his hand. He was thoroughly mad. But he did not go to see Judge Grayson. Instead he went to the Half-Moon and announced that Curley Adams was at the sheriff's office.

But his announcement did not cause much excitement.

"That's all right," assured Searles. "We can be sure of him bein' at the inquest."

"That part is all right," complained Ertle. "But Adams ain't in no cell. They're sayin' he killed Clark. Frisco Larkin never done anythin', and he's in a cell. What do yuh think of that?"

"I reckon we'll leave that to the sheriff," said Searles.

AS ERTLE turned away from the bar Skeeter Bill came in. Searles spoke to him, but Ertle did not. Skeeter leaned across the bar and spoke to the bartender.

"I want yuh to think real hard," said

Skeeter. "A little over a month ago a man came in here. He was a strange cowpuncher."

The bartender squinted thoughtfully at the ceiling.

Skeeter had spoken loud enough for every one to hear, and he looked past the bartender in to the back-bar mirror, wherein he could see many of those behind him. Moran, who was near a poker table, looked up quickly.

Ertle had stepped away from the bar as Skeeter spoke, but now he stopped and slowly turned his head, looking intently at Skeeter who was missing none of this. Ertle's eyes blinked and he turned away, shooting a quick glance around the room.

"A little over a month ago? Lemme see. No-o-o, I can't just remember it, Sheriff. What did he want?"

"I think he wanted to know which road to take to get to the Tin Cup ranch."

"O-o-o-oh, yea-a-ah. Say, I remember him now. I'm darned if I can remember what he looked like, but—lemme see. It was about noon, and I was washin' the back-bar mirror. He came in and asked me how to get to the Tin Cup. I told him to go north and take the right-hand road. Afterwards I wondered if he kept on the right-hand road and went to the old Box X."

"Much obliged," said Skeeter.

He turned and invited Searles to have a drink. Moran was standing near a poker table, but did not look up, and Ertle had drifted toward the rear of the room.

"Who was the feller?" asked the bartender, accepting of Skeeter's hospitality and pouring himself a drink.

"I dunno."

"Yuh don't? Then how do yuh know he asked me that question?"

"Guessed it," grinned Skeeter. "I knew that a stranger was headin' for that part of the range. If he was a stranger, he wouldn't know the way, and the bartender is the first person a strange puncher would question."

"That's guessin'," laughed Searles. "I haven't seen a stranger at the Tin Cup for longer than that, sheriff."

"I reckon that's right, Searles."

Skeeter turned to the door and Searles walked outside with him. They stopped on the edge of the sidewalk and Searles moved in close to Skeeter, speaking softly—

"He didn't find the Tin Cup, eh?"

"Nope. And he never will. Well, I've got to go back to the office. We're goin to hold the inquest at ten-thirty at the court room, and I've got quite a lot of folks to take care of."

"Curley Adams showed up, eh?" Searles went on.

"Sure. He was here when you fellers went huntin' him last night."

"The —— he was!" Searles smiled sourly. "Well, I'm glad. Ertle is awful sore about you keepin' Frisco in jail."

"He'll just have to keep on bein' sore."

Skeeter went back to the office, where he found Curley and Kaintuck playing seven-up, and Joy talking with her father. His story had been a shock to her, but she knew he was innocent of an intentional killing.

"What became of Calamity?" asked Gregory.

Skeeter did not know. It was nearing time for the inquest. He sat down beside Curley, motioning for Kaintuck to put away the cards.

"Curley, was there any stranger—a strange cowpuncher—came out to the Tin Cup ranch in the last month or two?"

"I never seen any, Sheriff. Frank Moran was the only one to hire out, or come out there after I went to work."

"Uh-huh. Was you there when Moran came the first time?"

"The first time? Yeah, I was sick in bed when he came to work."

"Are yuh sure of that, Curley?"

"Dead sure. There was a lot of work to do at that time, and the Tin Cup was short-handed, through me bein' sick. I know that Monk Clark inquired around, lookin' for an extra man.

"Moran came out there in the forenoon. Monk was gone, if I remember rightly. Moran came down to the bunk-house. I was pretty darned sick, but I remember hearin' him tell Asher who he was, and Asher said that Monk Clark was away.

"Asher had been stayin' pretty close with me, I reckon, and he asked Moran to stay with me for a few minutes. I heard him say he'd do it, and I think he was there for half an hour. Then he pulled out. It was the next day that he got a job with the Tin Cup, and he's been there since."

"You didn't talk with him, did yuh, Curley?"

"No. I was pretty sick and I didn't want to talk to anybody. But I remembered the

voice, and he told me afterwards that he had stayed with me while Asher went out."

"Curley, did you know that Frank Moran was a Government detective?"

"Gosh, no! Is he?"

"Yeah. Monk Clark knew it."

"Is that so? No, I didn't know it."

"He worked for Ertle a while. Ertle knows it."

"Well, I'll be darned! And what is he detectin', sheriff?"

"If you mean—what has he detected—not much."

"And I punched him in the jaw," said Curley seriously.

"That didn't mean much to a detective like him," grinned Skeeter. "I reckon we better get ready for the inquest, folks."

CALAMITY got a few drinks under his belt and threatened to become a menace to society. Instead of the liquor acting as an up lift agent, it acted the opposite. Calamity became morose, vengeful. He wanted to kill somebody.

Fortunately he did not want to kill just anybody. His objective was to make sorry the six men who had stolen Hank Gregory away from his home. He was perfectly willing to include Rugg, the mine superintendent. Rugg had rubbed his nose.

Rugg had also purchased a six-shooter. Calamity knew this, and chuckled with unholy glee. Sol Asher, Van Cleve and Charley Ames had heard Calamity's declaration of war, and wanted none of him.

There would be no satisfaction, no glory, in killing an old man. And what was more to the point, they knew that Calamity was an old gunman, as dangerous as a rattler.

"I've got the Injun sign on 'em," declared Calamity, his back against the Half-Moon bar, his hat pulled rakishly over one ear. "I can whip any one of 'em on a sheep-skin."

"Don't cover too much territory," advised Ertle disgustedly.

"Oh, my!" Calamity eyed Ertle speculatively.

It had suddenly occurred to Calamity that Ertle was one of the six men he was gunning for. He shifted his feet just a trifle and rubbed the palm of his right hand against the top of his cartridge-belt.

Ertle tried to appear indifferent and move toward the door.

"Too much territory, eh?" Calamity's nose twitched. "How'd you like to choose me, feller? Tell me what you'd rather fight with, and that's my fav'rite weapon. I'd fight you with anythin' from a darnin'-needle to a double-bitted ax. Ertle, I'll let you—"

But Ertle had reached the doorway, making a swift, if undignified exit, and Calamity started after him. But Calamity slipped, struck his shoulder against the doorway and rebounded along the wall.

No one in the Half-Moon laughed. Calamity straightened his hat, adjusted his belt, and came slowly back to the bar.

"Too much territory, ——!" he snorted. "They don't breed 'em tough enough for me in this day and age. Back in 1866 they made 'em whale-bone warp and bull-hide fillin'. And when yuh found a heel-mark in the sand, it was made by a *man*."

No one disputed Calamity. A cowboy came in and announced that some of the folks were already going to the court-room, and this information caused the several gambling games to cease operations. Calamity listened scornfully to the opinions of several men, and swaggered out of the place.

"They better keep him out of the court-room," said Moran.

No one disputed him.

"I'd like to know what the sheriff has under his hat," said the bartender.

"Prob'ly an empty head," laughed a gambler.

"Maybe. Don't anybody play him for a sucker though."

The crowd began to dribble out of the saloon, heading across the street to a room over the general merchandise store, where Moon River County held its court sessions.

Skeeter met Moran near the stairway, which led to the court-room.

Moran had been drinking, but was not drunk by any means. He removed his sombrero and ran his fingers through his matted black hair, his brown eyes coldly calculating, as he looked at Skeeter.

"What do yuh know?" he asked bruskly.

His voice was not at all pleasant now. Skeeter looked at his flat nose, the deep-set eyes and prominent cheek-bones, wondering if Moran did not have a goodly percentage of Indian blood in his veins. Skeeter hesitated so long that Moran said—

"What about the inquest?"

"We'll prob'ly have to put you on the

stand, Moran," said Skeeter. "It kinda looks like you won't be able to keep yore identity a secret any longer, 'cause it'll come out about that fire-place and the pieces of silver."

"I'm sorry about that," said Moran seriously.

"Can't be helped, I guess. This killin' is of more interest to Moon River County than counterfeitin'."

"I suppose. Say, you better take charge of old Calamity. He thinks he can run everybody."

"Oh, he won't hurt anybody."

"Won't he. All right. You'll have another killin' on yore hands the first thing yuh know."

"I expect to have several before I run out of ice."

"Yuh do, eh?"

This sounded interesting to Moran. But Skeeter did not stop to explain. Moran scowled at the back of Skeeter, who was heading back toward the office.

Ertle and Van Cleve came out of the store and looked cautiously around. They were taking no chances on old Calamity. Moran grinned, and it angered Ertle.

"Where is that —— old fool?" asked Ertle.

Moran shook his head.

"Probably up in the court-room."

"Is, eh? Well, I'm through foolin' with him. If he makes one more break at me, I'm goin' to shoot him."

"Sam Rugg got him a gun," offered Van Cleve.

"I spoke to the sheriff about Calamity," said Moran. "He don't think Calamity is dangerous."

"The —— he don't!"

"And I'm goin' to be called as a witness."

"Thasso?" Ertle frowned heavily. "You didn't see it."

"No, I didn't. But the sheriff is tryin' to hook this killin' up with the bad money idea."

"Yeah?" Ertle stared at Moran. "What's he got to work on?"

"Nothin'. He's just a smart sort of a jigger and wants to make a showin', thasall."

"Uh-huh," Ertle scowled down the street.

Skeeter, Kaintuck, Gregory, Joy and Curley were coming from the sheriff's office.

Ertle, Van Cleve and Moran moved back to the entrance of the store, while Skeeter and his crowd went in to the doorway and climbed the stairs.

"IT WOULDN'T take much for me to smash in that jail and turn Frisco loose," said Ertle. "I'd like to know why he's keepin' Frisco in jail."

"Could we smash in and git him?" asked Van Cleve.

Sam Rugg was crossing the street from the Half-Moon, walking unsteadily, but with caution. He grinned at the three men, as he joined them.

But Sam Rugg's smile was not one of gladness nor mirth; it was a grimace. He slouched up to them, his hands in his pockets, rather unsteady in his gait. He looked gross—grimy, with his crop of greasy black whiskers, his face flushed with liquor, and the red welt still showed on his head, where Calamity's revolver barrel had struck.

"Where is that old terrier?" he asked, meaning Calamity.

"Probably got drunk and fell down—" thus Moran.

"They've gone upstairs to start that inquest," said Ertle, speaking to Rugg. "If we don't show up they'll think something is wrong; *sabe?* They've got Frisco still in jail, Rugg. If you had a pick, I think yuh can bust in and let him out."

"Bust in the jail?" The idea seemed rather novel to Rugg.

"Sure," nodded Ertle. "Knock the lock off the back door; go in and pry off the cell door. That old jail is about as strong as a bird-cage."

"And then," said Moran, "the sheriff will probably kill somebody."

"Let him try it. I want Frisco out of the jail. He ain't got any too much brains, and he might think I've turned him down."

"I'll bust in the jail, if you say so." Rugg was willing to please.

"Go ahead," said Ertle. "We'll go up and listen to the inquest. Take yore time, Rugg. Tell Frisco to high-tail it out of town."

Moran, Ertle and Van Cleve climbed the stairs, leading to the court-room, which already buzzed with conversation.

It was not a big room, and many of the spectators were obliged to stand along the walls. Old Judge Grayson, who acted as a justice of the peace, presided. Gregory,

Joy and Curley sat at a table in front of the judge's desk.

A jury of six men had been drawn, and they all looked ill at ease. The doctor had managed to draw a jury of men who were in no way connected with either the Tin Cup or the Lazy H.

Skeeter signaled to Moran, offering him a seat near the front, which was accepted. A number of the audience were still under the influence of liquor, and it was only with difficulty that the judge was able to quiet the room.

Kaintuck Kennedy stood near the door, and his position was the topic of a whispered conversation in several parts of the room.

Kaintuck was too short to see over the heads of the crowd; so he hammered on the wall with his fist and signaled frantically for several cowboys to sit down. His mustache bobbed convulsively, and he swore loud enough for those close to him to hear. He stood on his toes against the wall and tried to be satisfied. A cowboy offered to hold him on his lap, but the invitation was not accepted.

THEN the judge began speaking. "We are not here to determine the guilt or innocence of any one, but to try and determine just how Monk Clark came to his death, why he was killed, and who is most likely to have killed him. The jury will abide by such evidence as may be brought out at this inquest. I will call Doctor Skeen, the coroner, to the stand.'"

Doctor Skeen's testimony was only relative to the fact that Monk Clark had been killed by a bullet wound. He described the course of both bullets, but was unable to state whether the shots had been fired at close or long range.

Skeeter Bill was next called upon to relate what he knew about the killing, and he told exactly how he and Kaintuck had found things at the Box X ranch. The torn-up fireplace and the finding of the attempt at making a dollar caused the audience to sit up and show interest.

Skeeter did not seek to defend Gregory when the judge asked him if, in his opinion, Gregory could have fired the shots which killed Monk Clark.

"Did you look at Gregory's gun?" asked one of the jury.

"I didn't," said Skeeter.

"Then you don't know whether he had fired his gun recently or not?"

Skeeter was forced to admit that he had neglected to inspect Gregory's gun. Several of the audience laughed derisively, and the judge rapped for order.

"Put Gregory on the stand," said Ertle. "Let's get some action."

"You better keep quiet in this court, or you'll get action." Thus Kaintuck, loud enough for every one to hear. Ertle subsided.

The crowd laughed. Even the judge smothered a smile. Kaintuck blushed and his mustache jiggled nervously, as he craned his neck to give Ertle a menacing glance. Skeeter nodded approvingly at Kaintuck, who interpreted the nod correctly. He shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"You danged right," he said. "I'm the greatest little shutter-up yuh ever seen."

Ertle growled something, but Kaintuck could not hear it.

"That's all, Sheriff," said the judge. "Henry Gregory, take the stand."

Gregory walked slowly to the witness chair and looked out at the crowd. There was no question that they were hostile to him. Speaking carefully he told of his suspicions that Monk Clark had tried to incriminate Curley Adams, and that he had, on the spur of the moment, started out with the intentions of killing Monk Clark.

He did not try to evade any phase of the incident.

"I could have killed him," he said slowly. "I reckon I had time to do it. I dunno how long it was before Joy came. It was a jolt to find him dead. She thought I had killed him.

"Then the sheriff and his deputy came along. I dunno what they thought. We looked through the house, like he has told yuh—and that's all."

"Ask him about that letter yuh found on Monk Clark," suggested Sol Asher. "That shows why he might kill Monk."

Doctor Skeen produced the letter, but the judge waved it aside.

"That case has nothing to do with the one at hand. Gregory admits that he had reasons for going out to kill Clark. It seems to me that the other crime, if it was a crime, was committed ten years ago."

The judge looked down at Gregory. They had been friends for several years, and the

old judge was very human. He smiled at Joy and looked at the audience.

"You must remember," he said softly, "that we are not examining into any motive actuated by a crime supposed to have been committed ten years ago. We do not actually know that any crime had been committed by Henry Gregory at that time. As far as that letter is concerned, it has no place at this hearing, as long as Henry Gregory admits that he had what he considered good and sufficient reasons for wanting to kill Monk Clark."

"Clark was afraid of Gregory," said Jim Searles.

"Where was Curley Adams when this was goin' on?" asked Ertle. "It seems to me—"

"If you want to be examined as a witness, c'mon up and set in this chair," said Skeeter quickly.

"I only want to get at the bottom of this, Sheriff."

"You will."

"Do any of the jury wish to question the witness?" asked the doctor.

"How long was you at the Box X ranch before yore daughter showed up?" asked old Mike Gower, who was one of the jurors.

"Long enough to have killed Monk Clark," replied Gregory.

"By golly, that's an honest answer," said old Mike.

"You shoot a .45?"—thus another juror.

"I do."

"So do I," Old Mike delivered this information and sank back in his seat. A ripple of laughter followed.

Gregory was dismissed and Joy was called to the stand. Skeeter assisted her to the chair and stood beside her while she told her story. She did not conceal the fact that she had ridden from home, hoping to overtake her father and to try and prevent him from attempting to kill Monk Clark.

"And when you found him, did you think he had killed him?" asked the judge.

Joy nodded slowly.

"Until I talked with him. Then I knew he was innocent."

"Did Monk Clark ever make love to you?" asked the doctor.

Joy shook her head quickly.

"He did not. Such a question is ridiculous."

The judge asked the jury if they desired to ask any questions, but none of them did; so Joy was dismissed and Curley was asked to take the stand. The crowd sat up straight when the Box X cowboy lifted his hand and was sworn.

"Where were you when Monk Clark was found dead in the yard of the Box X ranch?" asked the judge.

"I don't know."

"You don't know where you were?"

"No, sir."

The crowd sat forward. This was more promising.

"Have you and Monk Clark ever had trouble?"

"No, sir."

"You have heard that Monk Clark was blamed for misbranding a Lazy H yearling and running on your brand."

"I have heard it—yes."

"Did you meet Monk Clark after you had heard this?"

"I don't remember."

"You don't remember. What kind of a revolver do you use?"

CURLEY still wore his gun. He drew it out and placed it on the judge's desk. Skeeter and the doctor leaned forward to examine it.

"A .45 Colt," said the judge.

"Mike, you better go home and get yours," whispered one of the jurors loudly. "Kinda make it unanimous."

Skeeter knew that this was not Curley's gun. It was an old one which Curley had substituted for his forty-one, and Skeeter recognized it as being a gun he had inherited with his office. It was evident to him that Curley believed Gregory guilty, and Curley was trying to throw the evidence against himself.

"Since when did you start usin' a forty-five?" asked Gregory.

Curley did not reply.

"Take a look at the shells in his belt," suggested Ames.

Curley was stumped. Skeeter slipped a cartridge from one of Curley's belt loops and placed it on the judge's desk. It was a forty-one.

The judge squinted severely at Curley.

"Have you any story to tell, Adams?"

"None at all," Curley shook his head.

The judge nodded and Curley went back to the table. Gregory looked keenly at him, but Curley did not look in his dircetion.

"It seems that this is our last witness,"

observed the judge. "The jury will retire and try to arrive at a —"

"Just a moment, judge," said Skeeter. "I don't reckon the evidence is all in yet."

Skeeter glanced at his watch, smiled softly, and looked back at the judge.

"I am goin' to ask Frank Moran to take the stand."

"I don't know what good this will do," protested Moran. "As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter, but it looks as though it will merely take up valuable time."

"In just what way is Mr. Moran concerned?" asked the judge.

"Not in any way," said Moran. He wiped some perspiration from his chin and tried to appear indifferent. "I don't see why valuable time should be wasted in examining me. I did not see any of this, your honor."

The judge turned and looked at Skeeter, wondering why the sheriff should insist on examining a man who knew nothing to testify.

"If Mr. Moran will take the stand—please." Skeeter smiled exasperatingly at Moran, who grunted half-angrily, but took the witness chair.

"Why don'tcha call Calamity?" laughed a cowboy.

"Calamity is busy, watchin' the jail," grinned Skeeter.

Ertle started to get up, but sat down quickly. If Calamity was watching the jail—and Rugg was down there—Ertle swallowed thickly and kicked Van Cleve on the ankle.

"Mr. Moran," said Skeeter slowly, "is a Government detective. Am I right, Mr. Moran?"

"Go ahead." Moran tried to grin, when the crowd shifted and buzzed with whispers.

This was something interesting to them—but not to Moran. He shifted uneasily and looked at Ertle, whose face was drawn in a scowl of apprehension. He wanted to know what was going on down at the jail. If Calamity was watching the jail, things might not be so good for Sam Rugg.

And Moran was just as anxious as Ertle. Van Cleve's mouth sagged half open as he clasped and unclasped his fingers, realizing that any old place would suit him better than that court-room. Ertle shot a glance toward the doorway, as though estimating his chances to get out, but he caught a glimpse of Kaintuck Kennedy, and decided to stick it out.

Skeeter turned to the jury.

"Mr. Moran was sent here by the Government to investigate counterfeitin'. Mebbe some of yuh don't know it, but you've been spendin' a lot of bad money lately. Moran came here to stop it."

Skeeter paused to let this information sink in thoroughly before he continued.

"Mr. Moran has had quite a hard time around here. Monk Clark and Sam Ertle knew who he was. He had to let 'em know who he was. Then he came to get me to help him. That silver robbery was done by the counterfeiters, I think.

"Somewhere between one and two months ago, a strange cowpuncher came to this town. I'm not sure, but I think he went to the Lazy H, lookin' for a job. He didn't get one. Then he came here and asked the Half-Moon bartender which way to the Tin Cup.

"The bartender told him. This stranger rode away," Skeeter looked around the room. "I wonder if any of yuh remember seein' him."

"What did he look like?" asked Mike Gower.

"I dunno. When I seen him he didn't have no meat on his bones. Between here and the Box X he's hangin' in a tree, grinnin' wide. I wonder what he sees that's so funny."

The crowd was so silent that a single fly, buzzing on a window-pane, sounded painfully loud.

Moran shifted uneasily, a scowl drew his brows down until his eyes were concealed, and his elbows lifted to rest on the arms of the chair. Skeeter turned his head and looked at Ertle, but the thin-faced cattleman refused to look at him. Some one cleared his throat raspingly, and Moran tensed noticeably.

"I hung him up there," said Skeeter sadly. "The coyotes and magpies had their feed. He's got a wonderful grin. He's laughin' at somebody—who ain't laughin' back at him."

ONLY the uneasy scraping of feet followed this statement.

"What bearing does this have on this inquest?" asked the judge softly, leaning forward in his chair.

"Somethin', Judge. This man was murdered—shot dead. And the queer part of

it is—he was killed with a silver bullet."

"Silver bullet!" It was repeated twenty times, as the crowd leaned forward, questioning, until the judge rapped for order.

"Why was he shot with a silver bullet?" asked the judge.

Skeeter smiled softly and shook his head.

"Judge, it was fate, I think. The man who fired that shot did not know he was shootin' silver."

No one questioned Skeeter now. He took plenty of time as he scanned the crowd. The jurymen were sitting on the edge of their seats now, leaning across the rail in front of them.

Skeeter smiled down at Curley, who was staring blankly at him. For the first time, he knew what had become of his silver bullet. Joy reached over and put her hand on Curley's sleeve, as she smiled up at Skeeter. Gregory looked dumbly at Skeeter, hardly understanding just what was being said.

But the crowd knew that something was coming off soon. They did not know just what it was going to be. The jury looked at each other and back at Skeeter, whose thin face was set in a determined cast. He knew that they were waiting—waiting for him to make his next play.

But Skeeter was too clever a gambler to work fast now. He had made them listen to him—made them want more.

"It was a forty-one bullet, made of silver," said Skeeter, taking it from his pocket and holding it up. "It was made from a silver dollar. I know the man who made it. He shoots a forty-one six-gun."

Skeeter toyed with the bullet, while the crowd shifted anxiously. But Skeeter was in no hurry. He put the bullet in his pocket and glanced at his watch.

"This counterfeitin' is queer stuff," he said. "The Silver Bell mine was a handy place for them to get material. They had to have a certain amount of silver, yuh know."

Skeeter hesitated and appeared thoughtful. Jim Searles leaned forward.

"Keep talkin'," he said. "Dog-gone it, tell us about it."

"All right, Jim. This stranger wasn't wanted here, it seems. It looks to me as though somebody at the Lazy H saw this man. They recognized him, yuh understand. He went huntin' for the Tin Cup, and this feller who recognized him, follered him. The stranger got on the Box X road by mistake.

"The man who follered him from the Lazy H went to the Tin Cup and found that the stranger hadn't got there yet; so he stole a sick man's gun, went out and met the stranger—and shot him with that stolen gun.

"The stolen gun held a ca'tridge, loaded with a silver bullet. The man who killed him thought that the coyotes and magpies would soon destroy that body—and they did—but there was the bones, the skull that's still grinnin'—and the silver bullet."

"Who moulded that bullet?" asked the judge.

Skeeter smiled and pointed at Curley Adams.

"He admits it, judge."

Curley nodded quickly,

"I did."

"Who fired the shot?" demanded Jim Searles.

Skeeter turned slowly and motioned to Kaintuck, who came up to him. Skeeter's whisper was so soft that none heard what he said. Kaintuck's lip shut tightly and he moved aside, his eyes on the crowd, which shifted uneasily.

This was something they did not understand. They watched Kaintuck moving back toward the door, and they noticed that Kaintuck's right hand was swinging near the butt of his gun, his lips shut tight, eyes flashing from one part of the crowd to another.

Moran started to get to his feet, but sat back again, when Skeeter looked around at him. Except for the creaking of Kaintuck's boots, the room was quiet. Skeeter drew out his watch and glanced at it. From force of habit the judge took out his watch and noted the time. There was an old clock on the wall, long since stopped from neglect, and several men squinted at it. A spur jingled, as its wearer shifted his feet. They were all waiting anxiously—for what?

Somewhere down the street a revolver shot brought them all to attention. Two more followed in quick succession. Several of the men sprang to their feet, among them were Ertle and Searles.

"What's goin' on down there?" demanded Ertle.

Skeeter's lips shut tightly and he threw up one hand.

"Set down, boys! One thing at a time. I think it's Calamity."

"But what in —— is he doin'?" demanded Ertle.

Skeeter ignored the question.

"The man who killed the stranger was the same man who misbranded that Lazy H yearlin'; the same man who went to the Box X, tryin' to get the tools that he and his outfit had left under the fireplace where they had made bad money before Curley Adams bought the Box X.

"Monk Clark follered him, wonderin' what he was doin'. Yuh see, Monk had a hunch that this was the man who had branded that yearlin', and he was curious to see what he was tryin' to do. Monk was there at the porch when this man came out with his stuff. Monk Clark had the dead-wood on him; so he killed Monk."

Skeeter stopped suddenly, lifting his head to listen. From half a mile away came the long-drawn wail of a locomotive whistle. The passenger train was coming in on time.

"But who was the man who killed Monk Clark?" demanded the judge.

He was nervous and his voice struck a falsetto note. Out in the audience a man laughed hoarsely.

Skeeter did not reply just then. He had lifted his head and was listening closely. They could hear the dull roar of the train as it ground to a stop at the station.

"Who killed Monk Clark?" repeated the judge.

"The man who had to kill him to save his own hide," said Skeeter. He laughed softly, joyfully. "I've got him, Judge!"

Skeeter turned quickly to Frank Moran, while his hand dug deeply in his pocket. He drew out a yellow slip of paper, which he handed to Moran.

"It came yesterday," said Skeeter, as Moran took the telegram. "I plumb forgot it."

Moran's eyes flashed across the words—

WILL ARRIVE CRESCENT CITY TOMORROW TO TAKE CHARGE OF INVESTIGATION. (Signed) LONG.

MORAN did not look up, as he slowly folded the telegram. Then he half-lifted himself from his chair, as though to put the telegram in his pocket. Skeeter was watching him closely, and Skeeter's hand was streaking for the butt of his holstered gun when the telegram fell from Moran's hand which suddenly jerked back to his holster.

Moran was a gunman *par excellence*, and in spite of the fact that Skeeter was anticipating Moran's move, Moran's gun was out of the holster and coming to a level, when Skeeter fired.

It was all done so quickly that many of those in the little court-room did not see them draw their guns. Moran was knocked back in his chair, his right hand helpless, the gun falling between his knees.

But he was game. As quick as a flash he grasped the gun in his left hand, falling from the chair, as he tried to pull the trigger. But Skeeter's next bullet knocked all the fight out of him.

The room was in an uproar. Men were milling around, trying to get outside. From near the door came the crashing report of Kaintuck's gun, a yell of pain. And above the other noises came Kaintuck's yell.

"Stop Ertle! Don't let him go to that winder!"

Kaintuck's gun crashed again and his bullet smashed the window over Ertle's head, just as Ertle flung himself across the sill and dropped outside. The crowd had unwittingly interfered with Kaintuck's aim, and as he tore his way through the crowd, a revolver shot sounded down in the street.

Kaintuck ran to the window and leaned out. For a moment he stood there, turned and came back, with several men crowding him, questioning, sneezing from the powder smoke.

Skeeter was backed against the judge's desk, a serious grin on his lips, while those capable of speech demanded that he tell them what it was all about.

Part of the crowd were at the door, but now they parted to let in Frisco Larkin and old Calamity, who had Larkin by the arm and was forcing him along at the point of a gun. They were both dusty and torn. Calamity was grinning, but his teeth were shut tightly.

Calamity marched him straight down to Skeeter and sat him down in a chair. The noise subsided, when Calamity began talking.

"I was in the office," he told Skeeter. "Rugg smashed in the back door—and I let him smash. He came in and started to bust in Frisco's cell door. Then I heard Frisco tell him,——'My, I'm glad yuh came, Rugg! They've got the goods on us, I tell yuh.

Just before the sheriff and his outfit pulled out of here a minute ago, I heard him tell 'em about findin' my boot-heel mark in that trail where we stole the silver.'

"Then Rugg says, 'How much more do they know, Frisco?'

"And Frisco says, 'That's enough to cinch me. Let's git out of here, beat it to the Lazy H and grab up what money we can git. We've got time, if yuh don't stand there with yore mouth open.'

"Then Rugg smashed in Frisco's cell door, and I stepped out. Rugg tried to draw his gun—and he's still there.

"Frisco and me had a race out through the back door. Mebbe I'd 'a' had to kill him, too, but he fell over the busted door and I pistol-whipped him until he said he'd be good."

Calamity stopped, panting from the exertion.

"And yuh got Ertle, too, didn't yuh, Calamity?" asked Kaintuck.

Calamity nodded quickly.

"I per-sume I did. I seen him do his dive out of the winder, and I says to myself, 'Whenever a man leaves a court-room by an upper winder, he ain't jist right morally, so I whopped one shot at him f'r luck—and it tuck."

Old Calamity panted wearily and wiped some blood from his lips. But he braced his feet and grinned widely at everybody. Frisco slumped weakly in the chair and tried to feel of his swollen head.

"—— old wild-cat!" he blubbered. "Keep him away from me, will yuh? My ——, I know when I've got enough."

"I'm through with yuh," panted Calamity. "I know when I've hammered 'em down to my size, y'betcha. Thought yuh could outrun the old man, eh? Better be —— glad I didn't have to catch yuh with a hot hunk of lead."

Jim Searles shoved his way down to Skeeter.

"I don't *sabe* it, Sheriff. Was this Moran a Government detective?"

"Said he was, Jim. But I had a hunch he wasn't. He was one of them slick crooks who said 'yes' once too often."

"Tell us about it. Ertle and Van Cleve and Frisco! What a —— of a mess!"

"I got Van Cleve," said Kaintuck. "He came at me, clawin' for his gun, and I folded him up like a jack-knife. Skeeter told me to watch the two of 'em—him and Ertle."

A stranger had elbowed his way in to the room, and was standing on his toes, looking around. He was a big man, his gray hair showing beneath the brim of his Stetson. Suddenly he caught sight of Skeeter.

"Hello, Sarg!" he called.

"Hello, Long!" yelled Skeeter. "C'mere and lemme shake yore hand. Give him room, boys. That's Mr. Long, the United States marshal. Greetings, old timer."

They shook hands violently.

"What in the world has been going on here?" demanded the officer. "It seems that I ran into a shooting match."

Skeeter pointed at Moran, who was lying on his back, his arms flung wide. The officer stooped and studied his features closely for several moments.

"Didja ever see him before, Long?" asked Skeeter.

"Yes, and I know who he is. His name is Moran, and he's about the slickest counterfeiter you ever heard about. What in the world has he been doing up here in this country? Was he one of the—" Long hesitated. He did not want to say too much.

"Yeah, he's one of 'em," said Skeeter. "In fact, he was the head of the gang. This one prisoner is all we saved out of the set. Didn't you have a man workin' on this case?"

"I still have."

"No, you ain't. This Moran killed him over a month ago."

"Killed him? Why I've got wires—"

"From this feller. He impersonated yore man. Was yore man named Moran?"

"Yes, that's the name he was using. I think the other man's real name was Moran, but he has had many aliases. My operative knew him, but I doubt if he knew he was in this country."

"Yore man probably told Ertle what his name was when he asked for a job on the Lazy H," said Skeeter. "It sure gave the other Moran a fine chance to fill his shoes."

"That must have been it," nodded Long. "But how in the world did you ever find all this out? What made you suspect a perfectly, or I might say, apparently good detective?"

Skeeter smiled widely.

"Did anybody ever call you 'Shorty'?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Did you ever herd sheep down on Sundance Flats?"

"I never herded sheep in my life, Sarg."

"There yuh are. I called yuh Shorty, and he called yuh Shorty. I asked him if he ever heard yuh tell about the time yuh herded sheep in the Sundance Flat country, and he said he hadn't never heard you tell about it, but that one of the men in yore office started to tell him about it one day. That's what I had to work on.

"So I knew he was a liar. It simmered down to this Moran. I knew that some one at the Silver Bell had tipped 'em off about that shipment of silver, and Rugg looked like he might be the one.

"I kinda figured out that Monk Clark was in on the gang, but when he got killed I thought he had run into some of the gang who were moving their stuff from the Box X. That left the Tin Cup out of it.

"I had to find the feller who wore that certain kind of a boot-heel, and I accidently found it when I knocked Frisco over a chair." He turned to Frisco, who was holding his head in his hands, watched closely by Calamity.

"How about it, Frisco? You might as well talk."

FRISCO lifted his head wearily. "I dunno what in —— there is to talk about. It kinda looks to me like you knew it all. Moran branded that yearlin'. I found it out afterward. It was jist luck that Clark found it. Moran wanted to git even with Curley for that wallop he got."

"How long have you been with 'em?" asked Skeeter.

"I dunno. Moran was a friend of Rugg. He came here to steal silver—high-grader. It was too slow. Moran knew how to make counterfeit. Rugg knew Ertle pretty well; so they got together and framed up this deal.

"There was five of us in on the proposition, but only four of us held up the wagon and took the silver, 'cause Rugg had to stay at the mine. It was me an Van and Ertle and Moran who stuck up that wagon and took the silver. Rugg tipped us off. We had a —— of a time gettin' the stuff out to the Lazy H. Moran was the one who held the three men from the Silver Bell while I drove the team away.

"Moran had a horse tied down the hill, and he got down to where we were goin' to unload before I did. Moran sure was a bad actor. He killed the detective and he killed Monk Clark. He was beginnin' to get scared of you, and told Ertle he was goin' to kill you the first break yuh made. I reckon that's all."

"Yeah, I reckon that's all," nodded Skeeter.

Gregory, Joy and Curley were grouped together listening to Frisco's story, and Skeeter turned to them with a smile.

"I reckon you folks can go home now."

Gregory shook his head sadly.

"Have you forgotten about that other deal, Sheriff?"

"Oh, that's right," Skeeter squinted thoughtfully and turned to the Government officer.

"Long, can yuh tell me who was sheriff of Badger county ten years ago?"

Long smiled reminiscently.

"I should think I could, Sarg. Ten years ago I was wearing the star of that county."

"I kinda thought yuh was. Yuh served two terms, didn't yuh?"

"Yes, I was elected twelve years ago last November."

"Of Badger county?" Gregory stared at him blankly.

"Long, I want yuh to meet Mr. Gregory," said Skeeter. "This lady is his daughter."

The three of them shook hands solemnly.

"Yuh see," said Skeeter slowly, "Mr. Gregory is supposed to have killed the sheriff of Badger about ten years ago. That was what Monk Clark told him."

"Is that so? Monk Clark? Why, I knew Monk Clark down in Badger county, Sarg. That's right, he did move up here."

"He—he kept me in a cellar for almost two weeks," faltered Gregory. "I was with two horse-thieves. I didn't know they were horse-thieves. Your—the sheriff's posse opened fire on us. I got away, and Monk Clark kept me under cover. He said I—I had killed the sheriff."

Long laughed softly and shook his head.

"I guess he exaggerated it, Gregory. I remember the incident. We got the two men. They said you were innocent; so we didn't bother about looking for you."

"For ——'s sake!" Gregory tried to laugh, but it was only a grimace. "Didn't I see one of your men fall?"

"None of them got hit," said Long. "We got both—oh, yes, I do remember, Gregory. Jimmy Lewis' horse stepped in a badger hole and laid Jimmy up with a busted rib,"

Long laughed at the memory. "I don't know why Clark ever told you such a thing, unless he wanted something on you; so he could use you later on. Clark was politically inclined, if I remember rightly."

The doctor was busy, and several men were assisting him in taking care of the casualties; so the court-room gradually cleared.

"We can't thank you," said Joy to Skeeter. "Sometimes there are things we can't even begin to say."

"Thasall right," smiled Skeeter. "You folks run along and don't mind about thankin' anybody. If yuh want to thank anybody—thank Calamity—he wasn't bein' paid to do the job."

"No," said Calamity quickly, "I don't want no thanks. This has shore been a holiday for me, but I'll be —— if I'm goin' to stand here all day and poke a gun in to Frisco Larkin's ribs. If I knowed he was goin' to run, it'd be a different thing."

"I ain't goin' to run," Frisco shook his head sadly. "Next time I'll buy new boots." He looked up at Skeeter. "It sure don't pay to repair yore own heels—nor think a sheriff is a —— fool, just because he never was sheriff before."

"THAT'S right," said Calamity quickly. "He reminds me of a sheriff I knowed in 1866—and in them days they shore had sheriffs that was sheriffs."

Which was probably the greatest compliment ever paid to any man in Moon River valley—and the only one ever voiced by Calamity. Then he led the way back to the HG ranch, riding in the lead, his two guns hanging from the saddle-horn; while Skeeter Bill, Kaintuck and Long rode toward the Lazy H to confiscate the tools of a felonious trade.

Or, as Kaintuck expressed it—

"Give Uncle Sam a chance to use some of his money around here, eh? He sure lost trade in this country for a while."

"I was scared," said Skeeter. "I thought that train wasn't never goin' to come. I wasn't sure of a darned thing except Frisco's heel. I wanted to shock Moran just at the right time, dontcha see? If he made a break for his gun, I'd know my dope was right. Honest to gosh, it was seven hours from the time I handed him that telegram until he went for his gun.

"If he had stood pat I was stuck. I played for the one thing—breakin' Moran's nerve. He didn't dare to meet yuh, Long. He was cornered."

"I'd say it was a clever bit of detective work," said Long appreciatively.

"Just lucky," Skeeter smiled. "Lucky that I knew yore name wasn't Shorty—and Moran didn't."

"And yuh ought to give Skeeter ——," said Kaintuck solemnly. "He said yuh used to herd sheep. He used yore name in vain."

"I think he used it to advantage," laughed Long, and they rode down the long slope to the Lazy H, where no man lived—now. And over in a little swale near the Box X a skull grinned from the forks of a stunted tree, while four people rode along the dusty highway to the HG ranch; four people upon whom a great peace had descended. And for once in his life, Calamity was able to compare the present with the past—and not find any great fault.

A WEDDING PRESENT IN NEVADA

by Fred. F. Fleischer

IN THE late fifties, the widow Gowan eked out a livelihood in Virginia City by telling fortunes in the spare moments between cooking the meals for a miners' boarding house. Her income was all too small and when she was offered a job as waitress, wages fifteen dollars a month, tips and meals thrown in, by the only eating house of Gold Hill, she accepted and, packing her scant belongings into a carpet bag, she climbed down the steep road into Gold Hill.

Sandy Bowers was the other waiter. He had been there for years, a quiet, unassuming man who paid little attention to the jests of the miners who frequented the eating house, but attended to his business and his job, day in, day out, without any other wish than to save enough money to open up a place of his own.

The widow Gowan and Sandy Bowers got along well. So well, indeed, that the miners of Gold Hill thought it a shame that they were not married. Such a thought, however, had never occurred to those simple souls. They laughed at it and took it as merely another jest of the rough patrons of the eating house.

But one day after supper several of the miners lingered around the pine table and one of them addressed Sandy.

"Look here, Sandy," he said, "if you and the widow want to get hooked, me and the boys is willing to give you a big party and a wedding present. We'll give you one million dollars in mining shares."

Sandy Bowers gasped. One million dollars. There wasn't so much money in the world.

It must be said here that, after the first rush to the gold fields near Virginia City, a number of mines had been started, stock companies had sprouted like mushrooms after the rain, issuing stock at a par value of one dollar each, but since neither gold nor silver were ever discovered in Gold Hill, these stock certificates had now taken the place of wall paper in the cabins of the miners. They were considered worthless. And that was the joker. The boys would give Sandy Bowers a million stock certificates, not worth the paper they were printed on.

Sandy Bowers consulted the widow Gowan, and the woman was willing. They took the miner at his word and soon the glad news ran like a wildfire through the town of Gold Hill and spread to Silver City and Virginia City.

The wedding date was set and when the day came, there were great festivities in Gold Hill. The wedding of Sandy Bowers and Widow Gowan was a grand affair. After the parson had tied the knot the boys came and brought baskets full of stock certificates, a million of them, each worth a dollar on the face of it, but the whole lot could have been bought for a drink of red liquor.

Sandy Bowers tied them up in neat bundles and stowed them away. Then he and his wife went back to their jobs and forgot about them.

And then the Comstock Mine came in. They had struck gold. Most of the stock certificates had been given to Sandy Bowers and Sandy held on to them. He did not lose his head, neither did his thrifty wife, but soon thereafter a wise broker advised him to unload, and Sandy Bowers did unload.

He was a rich man now, worth more than a million dollars. Some say that he was worth close to that sum and others state that he was a multimillionaire.

The first thing Sandy did was to untie his white apron and quit his job. Then he went into the middle of the main street and invited everybody within hearing to have anything they wanted. It was his treat.

He did not have to ask twice. When he settled the bill on the day following, it ran into thousands.

It is not recorded how Sandy and his wife travelled to New York, but from there they went to Europe and in London, Mrs. Bowers was presented to Queen Victoria. Nothing was too good for them while they were in the "old country." Mrs. Bowers bought jewels and gowns by the score and, when they had seen most of Europe, the pair returned to Nevada.

Sandy bought a few acres of land about

12 miles from Carson City and there he built himself a magnificent mansion. The windows were French crystal glass, the door knobs from silver and gold and in a niche there stood a statue of Fortuna of pure gold. His cellars were filled with the choicest wines and his servants were legion. But so were the parasites who accepted his hospitality and became his daily guests for months on end. There was always a full table, the best that money could buy, and an orchestra, specially hired by Sandy Bowers, played every night for the dances he gave for his guests.

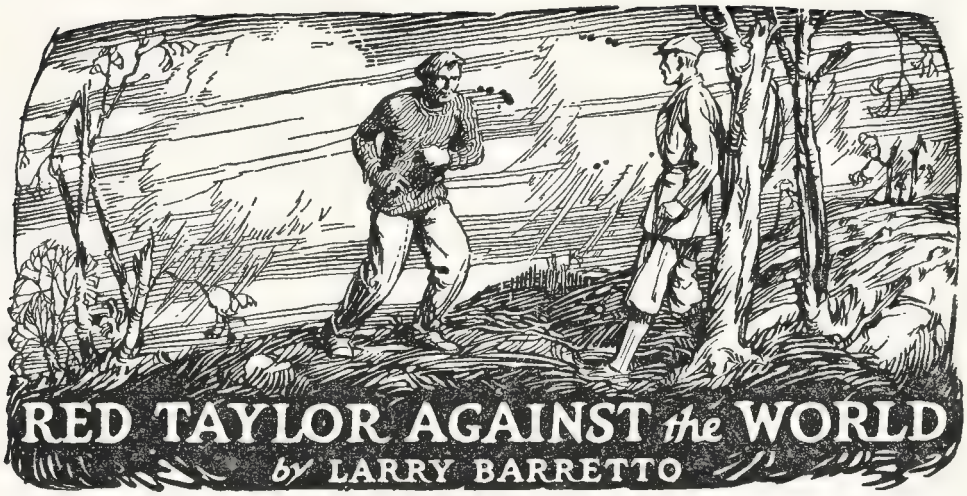
Not only did Sandy Bowers keep an open house where everybody was welcome, but he gave freely of his money to those who asked him and to those he thought were in need.

He gave and entertained as long as his money lasted. But one day he found that he had nothing but the big mansion left and that his friends had deserted him. He never got over this. It broke his heart and Mrs. Bowers, a widow for the second time, buried her spouse in back of the big mansion.

The statue of Fortuna was gone, no one ever ascertained what happened to this solid lump of gold, the common belief is still rampant that it is buried somewhere near the house. The knobs of silver and gold disappeared one by one and, after they had gone, Mrs. Bowers went back to her profession of fortune telling and for some time was known as the "Washoe Seeress."

Poverty was now her lot, and the once famous hostess of the big mansion, deserted by all, was seen to gather fagots to keep the hearth fire going. She did not live much longer after that. And soon, she too, was buried near the grave of her husband, in the back of the mansion.

The big house was sold by the sheriff and passed through several hands, until to-day it is a respectable roadhouse, close to the cement highway which runs from Reno to Carson City, resounding again to music, but not to the old fashioned polka and waltz. Jazz reigns supreme and the gay set of Reno and Carson City park their motor cars in the grove and gyrate to the strains of Tony's orchestra, on the floor where once Sandy Bowers' guests helped him spend a wedding present from the miners of Gold Hill in Nevada.



RED TAYLOR AGAINST *the* WORLD

by LARRY BARRETTO

Author of "Mute and Inglorious," "Sleep."

WHEN the Armistice was signed, Jerry Taylor, called "Red," thought that the war was over and rejoiced accordingly. Had he been born with foresight he might have cursed the shell which killed "Jo-Jo," while sparing him. But at that time Chelles was only a name; he had never heard of the man who called himself, oddly, "Je M'en Fiche," and he had forgotten the swamp at Cutry. They might never have touched his life like distorted shadows, had it not been for a pair of shoes.

There was to be another inspection. It was the policy of G. H. Q. to keep the men occupied, and the officers as well. They all hated it, but there was no escape from the monotonous routine.

"Why don't they send us home again?" was the unvarying cry. "The war's over, ain't it?"

Taylor had labored a part of a morning with the rest spreading his belongings on a shelter-half—knife, fork and spoon here, shirt there, tent rope coiled here, extra pair of shoes just above, all placed with nice exactitude. But there was no extra pair of shoes on Taylor's shelter-half. He looked again in his duffle-bag.

"Some guy's pinched my shoes," he announced bitterly.

The men nearest drew closer to their own shoes and denied it with vigor. Taylor's eyes traveled slowly down the line, examining the footgear.

"You took 'em, Eagan," he declared suddenly. There was no proof of this and Taylor knew it. But sometimes a man so accused would give a guilty start. Taylor had not the slightest interest in the shoes except for this inspection. Any pair would do.

"You lie!" Eagan answered promptly. Then as Taylor's fists clenched he qualified the statement. "I didn't take 'em, Red. Honest. My feet are too big."

He had no desire to make an enemy. Taylor had a very delicate conception of honor, and he disliked being called names. He was red-headed, of a peculiar redness that never forgave an injury and never forgot it. A grudge was a grudge which had to be paid off in kind before it could be wiped out, and until that happened he was filled with complete resentment. He had blue eyes, too, of a brilliant color that could flame into dangerous anger and then fade to a smoldering glow. They flamed not infrequently. Jerry Taylor had learned that the only way to hold your position in life was to defend it with fists, feet and teeth if necessary. This made a good soldier of him, but it conflicted badly with discipline. Now he chose to accept Eagan's apology.

"Oh, shucks," he said disgustedly. "All they can make me do is pay for 'em. We'll be goin' home soon anyway."

Then he stood upright behind his belongings; the inspecting officer was coming down the line. He was a young man, not much

older than Taylor himself, who was twenty-six. His face was pleasant and he might have had an agreeable smile had he permitted himself to relax so far. Now he was conscientious and rather stern, whiter than an officer should be who had been exposed to wind and weather. As if he were recovering from a long illness, it seemed. Taylor noted none of these things then. This was only another of the men sent out to harry them. As he came nearer down the long line Taylor saw that he had a captain's bars on his shoulders. Then the man was in front of him and his eyes were examining every detail of the shelter-half. If Taylor had hoped to escape detection that hope died when he saw those eyes. They were as keen as his own.

"Where are your shoes?" the officer inquired. His voice was neither hostile nor friendly. It was as completely impersonal as if he were addressing a slot machine.

"I lost 'em, sir," Taylor answered. The sooner this was over the better. He began to speculate gloomily as to the price of army shoes when measured against his pay. But the captain was not through with him yet.

"What do you mean, lost them?" he demanded. "They didn't just walk away." Now this was outside the game. The officer's business ended when he noted the loss and required the guilty one to pay for it, and it was not at all his duty to inquire into how and when. Taylor's ready anger began to rise.

"Well, they ain't here," he asserted. "Somebody stole 'em."

The captain turned to the sergeant behind him.

"Mark this man down for a pair of shoes," he said testily. "He probably sold them to the French. When will you men learn that selling Government property is just plain theft."

He addressed those nearest him rhetorically, neither expecting an answer nor getting it, except from Taylor. At the words all his smothered resentment burst into a flame of furious anger. His honor had been touched.

"Theft!" he whispered so low that those nearest him hardly heard the word, and as he spoke he sprang.

In the space of twenty seconds before they dragged him off Jerry Taylor undid all the good work which had accumulated to his credit in the months that had gone before. When at last they led him away, his arms pinioned by a husky private, a horrified sergeant acting as rearguard, the officer was just being helped to his feet. One eye was closing and his lip was split; his uniform was torn and he pressed a hand to his side as if he were in pain. Taylor turned and looked at him, taking in every detail of the other's face, engraving it, as it were, on a persistent memory. Neither of them spoke.

They court-martialed Taylor, of course. Discipline was discipline and had to be maintained even though the war was over. He knew what he was up against when he found himself in the small room of the general court—a room crowded with officers, secretary sergeants, and guards. No friendly face. The penalty for striking an officer might be anything up to death. It seemed to Taylor that it was impossible for his life to be snuffed out so ignominiously after what he had been through. He stood there dumb and sullen-eyed while the inexperienced young officer who had been assigned to the case defended him.

"This man has had an excellent record," he said doubtfully. "Why, on the Aisne—" He expatiated at some length on that campaign until the judge advocate stopped him.

"The court notes that the private has never been court-martialed before—that his record is good," he said wearily. "Get on to something else." The army was full of men with good records and conspicuous for their courage.

"I feel," the lieutenant continued thinly, "that the loss of his shoes might be considered a mitigating circumstance. Startled to find that they had been stolen he gave way to a sudden impulse of anger induced perhaps by the very severe battles which he had—"

"Bosh!" said the court rudely. "If Lieutenant Bradshaw is nearly finished we will think about lunch." He glanced at his wrist-watch.

"The captain who has preferred the charges wishes to testify again," the little lieutenant murmured and sat down.

The captain, who had been sitting in the back of the room, came forward.

"I think there are certain mitigating circumstances, colonel," he said, "although I made the charges. The fact that in effect I called Private Taylor a thief should be taken under consideration."

"But that was all brought out in the testimony," the colonel objected.

"I know it. But with apologies to the accused's counsel, I don't think it was sufficiently emphasized. I don't believe I would let anybody call me a thief and get away with it. My remark was perhaps the result of irritability induced by an old wound from which I still suffer. I'm sorry for it and I ask leniency."

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish," said the colonel, his good humor restored. "The accusing officer pleading for the accused." He laughed and everybody smiled discreetly at his wit. The tension was relieved. "Well," he continued. "If the captain has not suffered any disability we will consider his request for leniency."

The captain kept silent as to certain twinges in his still healing intestines which had persisted since the day of the fight that had in no sense been a fight, and agreed that he had not.

"We will then consider a verdict."

They considered while the flies buzzed on the window panes, the room grew stuffier and Taylor looking out at open fields wondered if he would ever be free again.

"Three months," the court announced at last and added a little homily on discipline, the duties of citizenship and the privilege of fighting for one's country. It was an extraordinarily light sentence.

All this meant nothing to Jerry Taylor. He was conscious only that he was being sentenced to three months at hard labor in a revolting prison camp because this officer had preferred charges against him. That the officer would have incurred charges himself had he failed to do so never occurred to him, nor would it have made any difference. The flame of his hatred had been lighted forever. As they took him from the room where court had convened he spoke once in a clear low voice without raising his eyes. He had no need to look at the captain; once was enough to plant that face in a memory that never faded.

"I'll remember you till I die," he said. "And I'll get you if it takes a lifetime." Every one knew whom he meant.

And so Taylor disappeared through the small door that led to Chelles, and the captain who had sent him there looked regretful until a stabbing pain in his side reminded him of the indignity he had suffered. He rather hoped to meet the fiery private some time when he had completely recovered and they were both out of the army. The men were near enough of a size.

II

AS A place of detention Chelles had a certain reputation to keep up, and it did its best. The guards were known as "hard-boiled," and their officers worked on the assumption that the prisoners were a bunch of desperate criminals. Maybe they were; at any rate, certain men issued forth when their time had been served, desperate enough and with criminal tendencies which they would have put into practise had they dared.

Red Taylor had served two months of his sentence. One month more and he would be a free man—free with a blot on his record. Day after day he worked in the camp, trundling wheelbarrows of dirt, emptying garbage or making roads until he felt as if his wearied body would drop. Nothing during the war had been so bitter. At night he fell asleep on his bunk which consisted of chicken wire stretched between bare frames, crushed by fatigue. Men vanished and new ones took their places. There were whispers, rumors, of prisoners who had been broken, who had disappeared forever. Taylor saw things which he never believed could happen, but he held his tongue. Once was enough to get into trouble. He held his tongue that is, until a guard broke O'Sullivan.

He was a freckle-faced boy of seventeen, certainly too young to be in the army, who had found life an irrepressible joke until he had joked too far and found himself in Chelles. He had in fact overstayed his leave in Paris. Taylor liked him. There was a certain gaiety about him which could never be entirely ironed out by prison discipline. O'Sullivan was the one thing that made the camp human.

They were walking to mess this night, a long line of shuffling men dressed in dirty denims, bent with exhaustion. They clutched their tin plates and spoons, dreaming perhaps of when they would be free. O'Sullivan was whistling soundlessly. Not even the hardest day seemed to tire him although he was a slight boy. Suddenly something shining in the dirt caught his eye, and like a monkey, curious, he stepped out of line

and picked it up. Instantly a guard was beside him.

"What've you got there?" he demanded suspiciously.

O'Sullivan opened his hand and showed him.

"Only a bit of glass," he answered and tossed it away.

"What did you step out o' line for?"

O'Sullivan considered this for a moment.

"To pick it up, I guess," he answered mildly. All the men had stopped moving. Some one sniggered.

The guard stooped for the broken glass and examined it carefully as though it were a dangerous weapon.

"What were you goin' to do with it?" He seemed determined to find a plot to escape, and O'Sullivan, suddenly overcome by the humor of it, helped him.

"I was goin' to make a noise like a hoop an' roll away," he said and giggled.

The guard caught the boy by the wrist and began to twist his arm.

"I'll teach you to make a fool of me!" he cried furiously.

O'Sullivan sagged to his knees and his mess plate dropped with a clatter. He remained silent. Then under the agonizing pressure he bent forward until his face was touching the ground.

"Oh, ——! Don't!" he begged. "You're killing me. Don't!"

Suddenly Red Taylor went mad with rage. He also stepped out of line.

"Let him up!" he cried. "Let him up, you dirty coward! You'll break his arm!"

There was a sharp snap. O'Sullivan shrieked once, then lay still, moaning. The guard straightened up and walked over to Taylor. Two other guards hurried up.

"Hold him," said the first guard briefly.

They caught Taylor's arms and stood on his feet. They were big men and he was held as if in a vise. The guard stepped back a pace, looked at the prisoner calculatingly, and then drove his fist into Taylor's face. He rocked to the blow. Again and again the fist came smashing in until he was limp, supported by the guards, and all the world had gone red and black about him. But not once did he cry out. The waiting men in line stared straight ahead of them, not speaking, nor daring to look.

"Now," said the guard, nursing his split knuckles, "get back into line again."

Taylor staggered back into formation and the men moved on. His feet shuffled automatically, but he could not see. He was dizzy with pain and blinded with blood. The man behind, stretching out an arm, guided him secretly.

That night Taylor left Chelles. It was so simple that he cursed himself for not doing it long ago. All was quiet in the barracks. Occasionally a man tossed, muttering in his sleep. The bed beside Taylor was empty; O'Sullivan had gone to the hospital, the bone of his arm broken clean.

"I wouldn't do it," Taylor thought, "if I could be of any help to him. But they'll have it in for us both now."

He slipped out of bed, found his shoes and walked from the building toward the latrines. On his way he picked up a handy barrel stave. A bored guard was marching up and down, wishing his tour of duty were over. He glanced up incuriously as the prisoner approached. Then he turned away. The barrel stave rose suddenly and descended. Without a sound the guard dropped. Taylor hoped vaguely that he had not killed him, but there were other matters more pressing and presently he forgot the guard who lay quiet for a time and then crawled painfully to headquarters, his forehead a bloody bruise. Thus did Taylor repay by proxy the beating he had received that evening. The empty blackness was waiting to receive him. Now he was concerned with the problem of escape.

He stole for the first time—a suit of clothes from the house of a laborer and in these he made his way toward Paris. The country was still filled with American troops and any movement would be dangerous, but he remembered that in certain quarters of the great city there were dives and hole-ins where the police never penetrated, and in this direction his footsteps turned. There were, he discovered, others who were doing the same thing. Quite a number of Americans had found it wise to desert their outfits, and the way was made easy for him. Eventually he found himself back of the Place Pigalle and before long he was outfitted as an Apache—the baggy corduroy trousers, blue shirt, red tie and all.

Presently Chelles and what he had suffered there faded into a dim haze of disconnected scenes.

The Café of the Guardian Angel knew him and the Café du Négre; he shared a tiny

room with two other men in the Halles, and he danced in the night-time with French girls of vague parentage and no morals whom he came to know as Elaine, Lolo or Céleste. His days were spent either in hiding from the American police or in gaining a livelihood which was precarious at best. Theft was a part of it whenever that was possible—petty stealing from counters or the fronts of shops—and an occasional day of honest labor when any one would employ him. Gradually he began to speak a bastard French which increased in fluency as he used his English less. Months drifted by.

In time he met Je M'en Fiche, because the man was a power in the underworld who made it his business to know everybody and who exacted tribute from many. He was a gigantic Frenchman, black-browed and with swarthy skin; a sinister figure. Murder was one of the many crimes imputed to him, and justly. At intervals he disappeared from his haunts for weeks, and the rumor was that during these periods he lived magnificently in a château beyond Versailles on his illegal gains, but this may have been only another of the improbable stories told about him. He was generous with what he had and once or twice he had been of assistance to Taylor. But this was part of his scheme; men who were in his debt were the more easily controlled. The time came at last when he felt he could use the American.

THEY were sitting in the Café du Négre, a damp cellar, ill-lighted, and dim with the smoke of many cigarets. Rough tables were ranged about the walls, and one corner was given over to a bar behind which stood the wife of the proprietor, a fat white woman married to a mulatto who had drifted from the West Indies to Paris. With Taylor there was a girl named Claire, a drab little creature who had become infatuated with him chiefly because he was the first man she had ever met who did not prey on women.

Je M'en Fiche noticed them and strolled across the room, a picturesque and dangerous figure, his mouth open in a crooked smile. Taylor looked up and spoke civilly.

"*Bon soir*, Fiche. Join us in a drink. What will you have? Cointreau?"

"*Rhum*," said Je M'en Fiche huskily and sank into a seat.

Taylor nodded to a waiter. Over the liqueurs they talked, the Frenchman ignoring the girl; she was, he knew, perfectly safe.

"I have a little commission for you," Je M'en Fiche suggested after a proper interval. "Something in which there will be much money."

"So?" Jerry Taylor was interested but non-committal.

"Yes." The Frenchman leaned forward. "I have a new supply of little white powders, a supply that will not again be cut off. To you I have assigned the honor of selling them for me. There will be little danger and much profit. Is it not so?" He waited expectantly.

"Cocaine?" asked Taylor. "Thanks, Fiche, but I can not accept the honor." He laughed, a little disgusted. "Dope selling is out of my line." He had not yet fallen that low, he reflected, especially since he knew what the drug could do to a man.

Je M'en Fiche stared at him in bewilderment through which anger struggled.

"You refuse?"

"Most certainly I do," Taylor told him warmly. "I don't care about the business."

"But I, Je M'en Fiche, order you to!" He smote his chest.

"*Je m'en fiche*—, I don't give a ——" Taylor retorted. "I do not take orders from you, my friend. Have another drink."

The girl beside them stirred, attracting the Frenchman's attention.

"This is your woman?" he demanded. "Yes? Well, you are too weak to have a woman. We of the Apaches do not allow favors to cowards. From now on she belongs to me. You understand?"

He caught the girl by the shoulder and drew her to him. She resisted slightly.

"Take your hands off her!"

For answer Je M'en Fiche leaned forward contemptuously and kissed her on the mouth. He drew back smiling, and Jerry Taylor struck. His fist grazing upward left a flaming mark on the Frenchman's cheek. Instantly shouts arose, "A fight! A fight!" Tables were pushed back, women and men struggled for the vantage point of chairs. Taylor and Je M'en Fiche found themselves in the middle of the room.

It was a fight that lived long in the annals of the Parisian underworld—straight American fighting against all the tricks that Je M'en Fiche knew. At that Taylor had the advantage in spite of the terrific reach

and the great size of the other man. He knew enough of Apache tricks to realize that he must keep clear of the Frenchman's feet. One kick accurately planted would shatter an ankle bone or cave in his lower ribs, and so he dived forward, infighting desperately, reaching the other's face again and again with short jarring blows.

The Frenchman was maddened by his antagonist. Either he could not break down that iron guard or Taylor ducked, letting the blows pass harmlessly over his shoulders. His eyes were filled with blood and his breath was coming in short gasps. Once he caught the American about the waist, pinioning his arms, and swayed forward trying to break his back. Taylor rested for a moment against the other's chest, then dropped to one knee and slipped clear.

They staggered across the room. A table overturned with a crash of breaking glass. The proprietor's wife began removing bottles from the counter. Except for the shuffling of feet, the grunts of the fighters, there was complete silence. The watchers stared intently, hardly breathing, wondering if they were seeing the fall of an old god, the rise of a new.

The fight ended as abruptly as it had begun. Taylor feinted with his left hand at the Frenchman's belly. A slow movement which the eye could follow. Je M'en Fiche, seeing it, dropped his guard and thrust his face forward. Taylor's right swung up with a terrific crash against the unprotected jaw. It sounded like the splitting of wood. The Frenchman swayed like a tree in a heavy wind, then dropped to the floor. A deep sigh rose from the crowded room. Red Taylor stood over him, hardly marked, the victor.

The girl Claire screamed once. With an incredibly quick movement Je M'en Fiche lying on his side had flicked a knife from his left armpit and flung it straight at Taylor. It struck him in the shoulder, tearing the shirt, ripping through flesh and dropped to the ground. The American spun around and raised one arm uncertainly as if in defense. Suddenly his body was warm with blood. There were excited cries, the rush of running feet; then the lights went out. There was no new god in the Café du Négre this night.

A week later Taylor was able to be about. Except for loss of blood he had not been seriously hurt, and his tough body recovered quickly. Life, he imagined, would go on about as before, but Claire soon undeceived him.

"You must leave Paris," she insisted. "They can not understand why you would not sell cocaine, and they are suspicious. I myself do not understand. Also you have fought Fiche. That is enough. In a week you will be dead. He has denounced you as an *agent de police*."

"I won't go," said Taylor. He was just red-headed and pig-headed enough for that.

Claire wept.

"What chance have you? A knife in the back. A body dumped from a cab into the Seine or left in the railroad yards of the Gare du Nord. I shall be desolated when you are dead."

This was not entirely true, although she wished her American friend well. She had fallen in love again with a young man who called himself Maurice Chatier, although the police knew him unfavorably by at least five other names and, having seen Taylor fight, she thought it wise to keep them apart. But she did not mention this. Although only seventeen, she had had experience with men.

"Well, I'll go," said Taylor reluctantly. Even he could see that the game was up. If the Apaches did not kill him, they could at least get him into trouble with the police and, although it was far behind him now, he knew that men were still being returned to America as deserters.

Imagine him at this time more than two years after the war. He slouched with that peculiar stooping position adopted by the underworld of Paris. He had grown a red mustache and he spoke French with a fluency that would have deceived any one but a Frenchman. His preparations for leaving Paris consisted of putting an extra shirt on his back and tightening his belt. Then he set out.

Presently Claire, Je M'en Fiche and the Café du Négre became hazy memories like Chelles and O'Sullivan.

For some obscure reason the old Front drew him. He could not have analyzed this nor did he try, but within him was a curiosity to see again the places where he had fought, and anyway one spot was as good as another. So he found himself at Soissons.

Soissons was still a wreck of a town. Its

streets had been cleared of débris, to be sure, but the ruined shells of houses overhung them, and there were empty places where houses had been. On the outskirts, dozens of wooden shacks had sprung up, covered with tar paper and with glassless windows, to shelter the refugees who were coming back, and in this quarter Taylor settled down. There was work to be done —work for all—but the American had no part in it. He had lost all inclination to labor.

An occasional day of clearing land for farmers sufficed him, and for the rest he found stealing a simple matter. A chicken here, a loaf of bread there, with luck a bottle of wine, and he had the means of sustaining life. And life had come to mean little more than food and a place to sleep. By day he skulked in hiding and at night he came out to wander about, avoiding those honest people who walked in pairs for safety's sake. Soissons was a lawless town, but it was changing. Already order was coming to it; police had arrived to enforce the civil law, replacing the soldiers who had until now been in control. It became comparatively safe for the average citizen and unsafe for Taylor.

The town of Vailly knew him for a while and later Vic-sur-Aisne. He had taken to living in dank cellars, ruined houses and *abris*, but always there was the march of reconstruction to contend with. Spots that had been dangerous during the war had become infinitely more dangerous for Taylor now in times of peace. Sharp-eyed peasants were about eager to discover the thief who had despoiled them of fowls or cheese.

There were still villages that seemed safe, like Nouvron which had been so completely ruined that it seemed incredible that it would ever be rebuilt. But one Fall morning Taylor awoke to the unaccustomed sound of horses' hoofs, and peering through the gap made by a shell in his home, he found that three wagons were there, loaded with the blocks of white limestone that was to be the new Nouvron. All day Taylor lay in hiding and that night he made his escape, wandering alone and wretched across the plain of Tartiers seeking a new place to hide.

More and more he was becoming definitely an outcast, and even the landmarks which had in a certain sense upheld him were disappearing. Now he had only the memories of better days to sustain him, and the visual signs that corroborated these were passing, had indeed passed. It was becoming increasingly difficult to steal, and he was often hungry. The thought came to him at times that it would be better to give himself up—to allow himself to be sent home to take whatever was coming to him. He did not put this into effect, however; he simply lacked initiative. Shyness had taken possession of him also, for he rarely spoke French and never English, his mind had grown rusty without the give and take of human companionship. He never saw a newspaper.

The clothes that he had worn when he had first quit Paris were rotted and torn and had been replaced with the poor stealings of various farmhouses. Now he shaved perhaps once a month when for some reason it was necessary to make a precarious visit to Soissons. The rest of the time a rusty red beard covered his face, and his hair which he cut with a piece of broken glass was ragged and unkempt. Jerry Taylor had left Paris to retain his self-respect and in a measure he had done so, but in the process he had become little better than an animal.

Only one definite emotion remained with him—hatred of the man who had brought him to this degree of misery. At times he talked aloud, telling himself the story of the shameful affront that had resulted in the fight and the court-martial and, as he spoke, the words coming haltingly, a clear unfading picture of the captain's face would rise before him and he would writhe on his tattered blankets, fists clenched until the nails bit into the calloused palms, muttering—

"—— 'im! Oh, —— 'im!"

It became in fact a sort of ritual.

He remembered his life in the army, but even that was fading. It was five years behind him now. Usually, however, he lay in the sun beside a ruined wall, when there was sun, thinking of nothing at all except the pleasant warmth of it. Or he ate, cracking the bones of chickens with an animal relish. On cold nights he burrowed deeper into the soiled straw, shivering in dumb misery until sleep claimed him.

On the night that Taylor was driven from Nouvron he slipped through the quiet village of Vic and crossed the River Aisne. Through

Vache Noire and up the road leading from it, past the huge quarries at Montois he went, walking fast for it was autumn now and the air was chill. He did not pause, for this part of the country was also being restored and there was no safety here. To the left of him lay the village of St. Bandry, its dim outlines showing in the distance, but it brought no memories to Taylor, for it was dark. It was not until he had passed through Cœuvres and was on the road to St. Pierre l'Aigle that he remembered where he was. Here five years ago and better, now, for it had been midsummer then, his division had attacked. They had gone over the top on a line from St. Pierre to Cutry at a zero hour which had been marked on the officers' wrist-watches as 4:35 A.M.

On an impulse which was not directed by any effort of will, Taylor left the main road and began crossing fields. Before him lay a copse of woods, and he headed for that. Five years ago he had done the same thing. For the moment those thick-branched trees meant shelter—and now he followed the same course because some dormant portion of his brain had awakened and ordered him to do so. He advanced as he had advanced during the attack—a quick run which slowed to a walk while he panted, his heart pumping from exertion. Just beyond the copse of trees he flung himself on the ground and clawed the earth uneasily, because there had been a shell-hole at this spot. A seventy-seven had burst not a dozen yards away and he could hear the whistle of its flying *éclat*, for once again Taylor was living in the war—all memory of the present forgotten.

He rose after a moment and continued on his way. Now he was Red Taylor, soldier *par excellence*, with the enemy ahead of him and a broken brown line behind.

"Come on there! Come on, —— you!" he shouted hoarsely, for the sergeant of his company had been killed and the corporal was nowhere in sight. The shadowy men near him seemed to reform in the blackness and they pressed forward again.

"Spread out there!" Taylor cried. "Spread out, I say. I ain't a stone wall for you to get behind!"

The men who had been his companions, many of them dead these five years, thinned again and Taylor was left alone. But he knew they were just beyond him in the gray mist; he had the comforting feeling of their nearness.

"Hey, you, Jo-Jo boy," he called. "Everythin' all right over there?"

"All right by me, Red," came a faint answer. Jo-Jo had been killed before Berzy-le-Sec.

To the right of Taylor was the ruined remnant of a barn, its walls tottering, the roof fallen, and the man skirted cautiously around it. Beyond was a new barn, its smooth stones unmarked by shrapnel, unafraid cattle nosing one another in the stall, but he did not see that, for the darkness hid it. Above was a slight slope peppered now by bursting shells and wrapped in a veil of smoke which drifted down to his nostrils with an acrid odor. Before the hill was a swamp, a boggy place into which one sank almost knee-deep through rotting moss that barely covered the slimy water. Through it blasted saplings thrust themselves, their limbs torn and hanging, and among these Taylor plunged. The water chilled his legs and seeped in through broken shoes. Now the German fire had risen to the proportions of a barrage, and whine of shells could be heard moaning overhead.

"It's cruel work," Taylor whispered, the breath sobbing in his throat. "Oh, it's cruel!" He sagged to his knees and gulped down the stagnant water that seemed so refreshing. "That's better," he muttered and rose to his feet. "I'll tell the world that's good!"

But now he was seized with an uneasy panic. Where were the men who were to come up to support him? Where was Captain Porter who had lunged after and beyond him, pausing for a moment to slap him on the back? Somehow he knew that the officer's gas mask was gone and he wanted to make a joke about it, but the captain did not come. Where were his supports? Did they think he was going to attack that —— hill alone?

"Pershing expects too —— much," he muttered. Then he raised his voice. "Hey, Lewis! Hey, Eagan! Hey, Pallen! Where the —— are you?"

He strained to hear an answer, but that crashing uproar carried it away.

"The ——!" said Red Taylor. "Lettin' me do the whole work!"

Now he was on the outskirts of the swamp and again he heard voices. To the left of him was a faint sound—a weak

cry like a hurt child. Taylor made toward it.

"It's all right, Loot!" he called. "I'm comin' up to you."

The officer was lying there sprawled behind a broken tree. Taylor knew he was a lieutenant by the single silver bar on one shoulder, although he was dressed like a private in order not to be picked off by sharpshooters. His shoes and his spirals were covered with a thick yellow clay which was drying now. Where the —— had he been to get smeared like that? His face was white, but it could hardly be seen for the blood that had been streaked over it. Red Taylor knew anyway that he was not one of their officers. The man had a stomach wound and his hands seeking to staunch it had been wiped on his face. That was bad. Stomach wounds raised the —— with a man.

"I must get him back to where them —— stretcher-bearers can find him," Taylor thought. Already he could feel that dead weight in his arms as he struggled through the swamp.

"I'm comin', Loot," he called reassuringly. "I'm comin'!"

The American with the shaggy red beard, the worn corduroy trousers and the blue shirt dropped to his knees and began searching in the darkness. But the officer could not be found. He was there by that shattered tree, but now there was no tree. This —— night was blacker than ——. Only just a minute ago he had seen him.

"I can't find you, buddy," he cried despairingly. "I don't seem to see you." There was no answer.

The noise of battle was growing less; already it was dying to nothing. The smoke which stung his nostrils had strangely cleared. The sky above the hill on which the Germans were entrenched was now streaked with a pale morning light. In the swamp a bird began to chirp. Slowly Red Taylor the soldier became Taylor the deserter—the Apache, the thief. All else had happened long ago, too long ago almost to remember.

The rising sun found him lying outstretched, arms flung apart, his shoulders shaken with sobs. In the distance where the smoke of battle had been, the smoke of a kitchen fire curled up slowly from a new farmhouse in this restored land.

III

INSOMNIA took Malcolm Hibbard across the ocean five years after the war. He had worked hard and he was overtired. He was, he found, growing older; it showed itself in a certain indifference to life, from which the zest had departed. And he could not sleep. Combined with a slight but continuous headache, it made him desperate. His doctor talked vaguely of a disorder of the nerves—and prescribed a sea trip.

"You must get a little excitement out of life," he said. "Find something to thrill you even if it isn't permanent. Now Paris is just the place for that. Be off with you and don't let me see you back for three months."

Malcom Hibbard agreed dutifully, although he had little faith. Something had to be done, however. His sleepless nights, in which he consumed too many cigarets, left him exhausted and burnt out the following day. And so he bought a passage for France.

Paris did not hold him at all. He did the Louvre, the Cluny and the Luxembourg conscientiously and he wandered the streets on his sleepless nights hoping to find a footpad who would knock him on the head. The rest of his time he spent drinking too many cocktails at the Ritz bar. After three weeks of this he quit in disgust and returned to the Front.

He did not particularly want to revisit the ground which he had fought over, but it seemed to be the thing to do, and he hoped that a few days away from the auto horns and the fogs of Paris might give him some rest.

The train set him down at Soissons. Hibbard ignored the motor bus and decided to walk to a hotel. The few hacks drove off with their fares. A couple of old peasant women laden with market baskets disappeared chattering volubly. Lounging at the end of the station, a ragged man with an untrimmed red mustache watched Malcom Hibbard with interest. His bright blue eyes opened wider as if with unbelief and he took a few steps forward. He hesitated, staring, and then came rapidly up to the American who had already started away.

"Carry your bag to th' hotel, sir?" he asked. "*Le Lion Rouge est le meilleur.*" He corrected himself and continued in

English. "The Lion Rouge is top-hole around here."

His voice was hoarse and the words came slowly as if he were searching for them. Had Hibbard noticed he would have seen that the man's hands were trembling and that his throat contracted oddly. But Hibbard never noticed anything now. He felt a faint surprize that this rag-tag person spoke English, but he was too indifferent to inquire into that.

"All right," he answered and handed over the suitcase.

They said very little on the way to the hotel. Hibbard, glancing about, asked an occasional question which the other hardly answered. Taylor was thinking, and thinking hard for the first time in years. He had dared to come into Soissons in the daytime impelled by the loneliness which he had felt since certain experiences a short time before. He wanted to see people, not to talk to them, but just to be near human beings. He wanted to see a train come in. The grinding of the wheels, the whistle and the escaping steam had filled him with an unformulated pleasure, and then from the train had stepped the man whom he had hated for years, the captain who had been responsible for his court martial. It seemed incredible, but Taylor never forgot a face, and this man had hardly changed. Older, yes, thinner perhaps, and with tired lines about the eyes, but essentially the same. He must think of some way to keep near him, for such a thing could never happen twice. Tomorrow or the day after he would be gone forever. The flame of Taylor's hatred shriveled him at the thought. At the door of the hotel he accepted the tip the other offered and posed a question awkwardly:

"Can I take you round the town, sir? Or maybe you're just passin' through." He waited anxiously.

"No," Hibbard answered. "I've seen enough here. What I came back for was to go over the old Front. I wanted to see a bit of barbed wire again, but I guess there isn't much left."

"Oh, yes, there is," Taylor assured him eagerly. "Plenty of places that ain't been touched yet an' I know 'em all. Take me with you as a guide, sir. I was a soldier once an' I'm wise to the whole works." His voice was pleading and he quivered like a thoroughbred dog. Hibbard looked at him in some surprize.

"All right then. I'll hire a car and you can meet me here at two o'clock. Now I'm going to get a room."

Taylor's hand went up to his shaggy head in salute, and his "Very good, sir," was respectful, but when he was safely away from the hotel he spun the piece of money the captain had given him into the gutter with a curse. He had forgotten much in his years of living like an animal, but he remembered enough for that.

The automobile was an antique which rattled ominously, but it made good time. At the wheel sat the chauffeur gloomily wondering why the American chose to travel in such chilly weather. Hibbard and Taylor sat behind. The car slipped along the highway toward Compiègne. There was little said that was of importance. The red-headed man proved uncommunicative to the ex-officer's questions. Yes, he had been a soldier, but he failed to tell what division he had been with. What was he doing in France? Just "working round." They lapsed into silence. In the west a pale sun which cast no reflections was already sinking.

Hibbard looked at the desolate landscape, trees stripped of leaves and barren brown hills, with weary disillusioned eyes. There was nothing here for him to see and nothing that he wanted to see. He swore at the entire race of doctors and his own in particular. This trip to France had been an idiocy from which he would gain no benefit. The thought of another sleepless night before him was appalling. What was the matter with this stupid fool beside him? His blue eyes were staring savagely ahead and he was muttering to himself.

"Come on," said Hibbard sharply. "If there isn't anything to see let's go back; it's growing cold."

Taylor leaned forward and spoke to the driver.

"We turn off here," he answered. "In a minute you'll see all that's left of the old Front, sir."

They turned to the left and began climbing a steep hill; presently the car passed the dark entrance to a huge quarry. Hibbard leaned forward with interest.

"I know —— well I've been here," he said with conviction.

The other nodded.

"Montois. A bit beyond is Cutry."

The car swept through a village whose

shattered walls still stood incongruously beside newly built houses. They were in the open country again and Taylor spoke to the other man.

"You'll have to walk here if you want to see anything. There ain't much of the old stuff left along the roads." He kept his voice impassive and his face was turned away. By an effort of will he seemed to be able to still even the beating of his heart while he waited for an answer.

"I'd like to," Hibbard answered. "There's a reason why I'd like to walk through here and my legs are numb. How about the car?"

Taylor's breath escaped with a suspiration that was almost a sigh.

"I'll tell the chauffeur to drive on and meet us at St. Bandry," he said thickly.

They had crossed the first field and were approaching another where in the distance a long mound, half filled with débris, marked the line of trenches. Beyond were strands of rusted wire hanging from rotting stakes. To the left, faintly seen through the white mist that was now rising, was a copse of dead and dying trees, their branches blasted by shell fire. Taylor made toward these. He had changed in some intangible way; now he was no longer the uneasy bum lounging against a corner of the station. His shoulders had straightened and he advanced with a swift gliding motion, glancing back occasionally to see if the other man was following.

Hibbard watched him curiously. Now he could readily believe he had been a soldier, but when the red-headed man answered a question he omitted the "sir." His voice had changed too; the rasping quality was more evident, but beneath was a hidden satisfaction, as if from the contemplation of some secret pleasure. They were approaching the clump of mist-covered trees.

"The best is on the other side," Taylor said, "but you may get your feet wet passing over. Are you game for that?"

Hibbard hesitated, glancing at his polished shoes and the heavy silk golf stockings. But in the other man's voice there had been a note of contempt that roused a slow anger in him. Now they stood there definitely antagonists, and each knew it.

"Go on," he answered. "I'm not afraid of wet feet and I want to get to the other side."

The swamp closed in about them. From the soggy moss rose a putrid odor of decaying things and in open pools a thick yellow slime had formed. The man plunging ahead was hardly more than a shadow, but once when he turned, a pale light in an opening of the trees struck down on his face. In that dimness the red mustache had disappeared and the face had become younger, more eager. The ragged sweater and the loose peasant trousers faded until they seemed more like a uniform of olive drab than the graftings of civilian clothes.

"Well, are you comin'?" he called back. His voice had an arresting quality—a certain tone that stirred forgotten memories. Hibbard stood stock-still. Then—

"Yes," he answered slowly, very slowly. "I'm coming."

He was panting when he reached the slight rise of ground in the middle of the swamp, but it was not all exertion that made his heart race so furiously. Red Taylor was waiting for him.

"So you got through, Captain," he said. "You come all the way, eh?" His voice expressed unutterable satisfaction. It was as if he were gloating now.

"Yes," Hibbard answered. "I got through."

"There oughter be more light," Taylor complained. "I can't really see your face an' I wanter see your face. You don't know me, Captain?"

Hibbard did not answer. He moved ever so slightly until his back was against a tree.

"I'll tell you, then," said Taylor. "I'm Red Taylor, but that don't mean nothin' to you. Well, then, I'm the guy you had court-martialed and sent up for sockin' you when you said I was a thief. Do you remember now, or are you one o' those birds that can't think back that far?"

"Yes," Hibbard answered quietly. "I remembered about two minutes ago."

"Well, I'm glad," Taylor continued, "an' it saves me a lot of time, for I wanted you to know it all an' remember it before I bumped you off."

"What?"

Involuntarily Hibbard took a step backward in the direction from which he had come, and his face grew white, but he really felt no surprize. It was as if five years had dropped away and they were facing each other again in the small room of the General Court.

"I wouldn't try that," Taylor warned him. "Because it wouldn't do no good, Captain. I got a knife here in my belt an' I can throw it better'n I can stick it. But I ain't goin' to do it that way. No. I'm goin' to do it with my hands. So." He stretched them, huge and knotted, before him. "I'm givin' you more chance than you gave me, you ——!" He spit the word out in a sudden choking passion.

Hibbard knew that actually it was no chance at all; he was in poor shape and this other man was physically like a gorilla. There could be no doubt as to the outcome. The thought of those writhing hands twisting about his throat, forcing his head back until there sounded the snapping of vertebræ, dazed and sickened him. He who had blithely walked the streets of Paris looking for a footpad to knock him on the head, who had declared that life was not worth the living now was appalled at the prospect of imminent death. There were a dozen vital reasons why he should live—fifty, a hundred.

"Do you mean you're going to try to kill me because I had you sent up for a few months?" he demanded. "They'll hang you for it."

"Oh, no they won't," Taylor answered. "They may never find your body in this muck—things rot fast here. In a few weeks you'll only be another war skeleton that they missed, an' by night I'll be well on my way north. The chauffeur will think we skinned him out of a ride, an' that'll do for him. And I ain't croakin' you for three months, Captain; no, I'm doin' it for five years, for all my life, for now I can't never go home. I got too much behind me, see? Deserter, Apache, stick-up man, thief—"

In a few words he had told the whole story, his voice sobbing with passion. Hibbard, listening, felt above his fear a sense of hopelessness at the waste of it, and of guilt. He had wrought this ruin by one careless word.

"You called me a thief," Red Taylor was saying, "an' you made a thief. So now we evens up scores." He took a crouching step forward, his hands raised like a boxer's on guard.

Hibbard's eyes had been darting about, seeking some weapon to defend himself against this maniac, but there was nothing. His mind was working with desperate rapidity. Something—anything might happen if he could postpone that hopeless struggle for a few minutes.

"Listen you, Red Taylor," he said, and his voice was unafraid. "You're sport enough not to use a knife, now be sport enough for something else. I've come three thousand miles to get here just so I can cross this swamp. I want to get to the other side because I was wounded there and I want to find the place; it's just beyond. Are you going to let me?"

Taylor was disappointed. In his dreams he had seen this man begging and whining before him, whimpering as the boys had at Chelles, but he seemed too indifferent even to have fear. Perhaps after he had thought it over a little, and realized what was ahead—

"Find it then," he said gruffly. "But you walk first this time."

They had crossed the swamp and stood clear on the other side. Before them a slight slope of hill rose, cleared now of barbed wire, quiet and empty. Hibbard began to talk in a low monotonous voice as he moved about, covertly seeking for some weapon.

"It was about here," he said, "or perhaps a little farther on. I had strayed in the darkness, and then I got into a clay pit—thick yellow stuff that dragged my feet down and covered my spirals. When I got out I was in rough open country and the Germans beyond the hilltop were dotting the whole place with .77's and bigger. I could see them explode—gray puffs. Well, one bit got me right in the gut and I went down on my knees. I couldn't find a first-aid packet so I tried to staunch it with a handkerchief, but it was no go. I began to crawl then and I came in this direction. There was a shattered tree and I got behind that for shelter—not that it was much of a shelter, though, in that fire. I don't see the tree now; perhaps it's farther on. I guess I cried out once or twice—I was hit pretty badly—and then I heard a voice calling 'I'm coming, buddy. I'll be right with you. Hang on a bit.' A doughboy carried me back through the swamp, and where that patch of high ground is he covered me with his body for ten minutes during a regular hail of fire. But I don't remember much of that because I fainted about that time. Where the deuce do you suppose that dead tree is—a bit farther on?"

He moved cautiously ahead a few steps.

It was growing darker now; in a few minutes he might dare run for it, risking the knife flung into his ribs.

"What was your rank then?" Taylor asked strangely. Hibbard walking ahead could not see his face, but the voice had altered.

"Loot," he answered. "I'd taken off all the glad rags, but I had one silver bar on my shoulder. Later they made me a captain."

Taylor's voice was suddenly broken by such intolerable suffering that the other man swung about heedless of the danger.

"I done it!" he cried. "I brought you in from that busted tree an' laid you near a ruined barn up by the road for the stretchers to find. Do you remember now? We went over at 4:30 in the morning from Aigle to Cutry. I brought you in, Loot, but I didn't know. Later I didn't know—"

Hibbard was sick with the shock of it. For a moment he could not speak.

"You saved me," he said at last. "And then I sent you up—busted your whole life, crumpled it up and tossed it away like a ball of paper. And I didn't know either. Oh, my God!" His eyes were smarting with tears and his head dropped.

For a long time Taylor stared at the man whom he had hated for years, the man whose life he had saved. He seemed like two beings with separate personalities which curiously intermingled and yet were separate and distinct. In the darkness that was falling they faced each other in silence. Then Taylor's hand dropped to the knife hidden at his belt. He drew it out and tossed it to Hibbard's feet.

"I couldn't do it now, Loot," he said heavily. "Take the knife or I might want to hurt you with it later. I don't know who in —— you are or how I feel about you."

Hibbard stooped for the knife and threw it behind him into the swamp. His mind was racing ahead, trying to solve the problem of the man before him. The responsibility was his, he could not shirk it and he did not want to. If ever a man had a double debt to pay, a debt with years of interest, it was he.

"You can't feel much about me now," he said slowly. "But later—I want you to come home with me and perhaps in time I can make up a little for—" He paused. "I've a —— of a nerve talking about doing anything for you. Probably you hate me so you don't ever want to see me again," he said with sudden humility.

Taylor thought this over.

"I don't know. I've hated you for so long. Some time when you was off guard—I might—you couldn't trust me, Loot. I would like to go home," he added wistfully. "I bin against the world too long."

A delicious lethargy was creeping over Hibbard. His taut nerves were relaxing, his eyelids drooping with the sleep that had been long denied. Deliberately he dropped on the brown field. Then he did something which won Red Taylor forever.

"I want to sleep for ten minutes," he said simply. "I haven't been able to sleep for weeks and I'm all in. I'm not afraid of you or anything. Watch beside me for just ten minutes, will you, Red? And then we'll go find that car."

CHARLIE PREACHER—SOLDIER EXTRAORDINARY

by Charles Nicholls Webb

FEW who have called themselves "soldiers of fortune" have had such varied, colorful careers as Charles Preacher, who began his military life as an orderly to Gen. Robert E. Lee in 1861 and ended it as an infantry sergeant in 1899.

His right name was Berry and he was the son of well-to-do Southerners, who were visiting in London, England, at the time of his birth. At the outbreak of the Civil war he disappeared suddenly from Washington and Jefferson College, where he was a student, and when he was next heard of he was at the side of Gen. Robert E. Lee, of the Confederate army. At the battle of Malvern Hill, he was dispatched in search of the general with a message from President Jefferson Davis, but before reaching his destination he was shot through both lungs. This seemed a serious wound but the result was little short of a miracle. Before the Yankee bullet drilled him through, his lungs were weak. When he recovered, he rapidly developed a healthy constitution, which he maintained the rest of his life.

The Civil war was finished and the young Southerner found his occupation gone. He made his way to Mexico at once and there found a place on the staff of Maximilian.

Maximilian was captured and Berry was taken with him. With the invading leader he was sentenced to be shot. But Berry did not intend to give up hope without a struggle.

The night before the sentence was to have been carried out, he watched his opportunity and caught the sentry, who was guarding him, napping. He overpowered the Mexican, seized his gun and made his way through the lines.

It was a difficult matter to get to the seashore, but in some way young Berry traveled there, and embarked for Cuba. In Cuba, Don Carlos was preparing to go to Spain. Berry joined his forces and took part in the fighting which followed. He was shot in the leg, captured and again was sentenced to be shot. This time he was freed by the intercession of the English consul to whom he appealed on the ground that he was born in London and was an English subject.

When his wound was healed he went at once to Russia and enlisted in the Russian navy. After a year of service he was transferred at his own request to the Russian army. There he served until 1870, when at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war he deserted the service of the Czar and joined the French troops. He served through the war but this service was without any personal distinction.

He had enough of fighting for a time. He came back to the United States and married. After his marriage he went to the mountains of West Virginia where he became a traveling evangelist. Here is where he first became known as Charlie Preacher. The mountaineers called him that and somehow it stuck. Domestic difficulties made him a wanderer again. He parted from his wife and enlisted in the regular army. He was assigned to the 16th infantry and remained with them until he was forty-five years old. He was given his discharge at Fort Meade, South Dakota.

From this place he went to Rapid City and was in the restaurant business for a time. Here he went on the rocks.

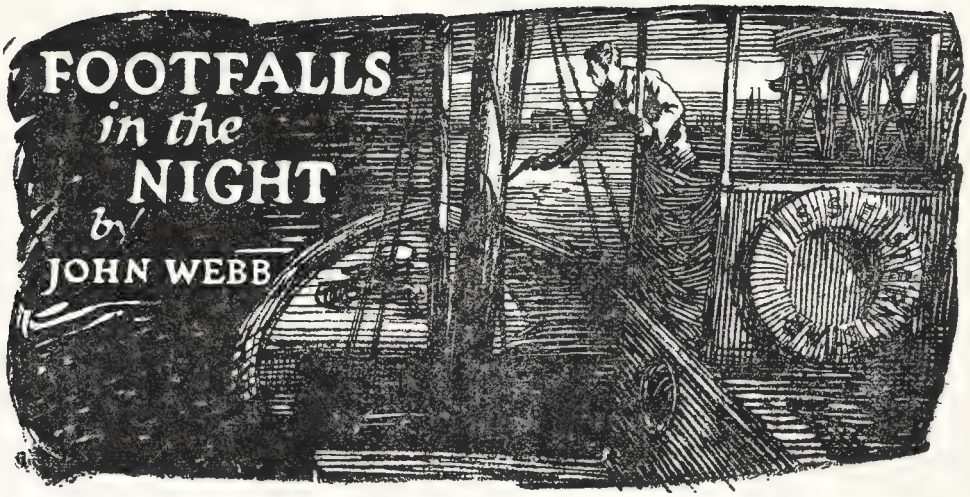
Joseph B. Gossage, a Rapid City newspaper man, befriended him and put him on his feet again. He was a sheep herder when the *Maine* was blown up and war was declared with Spain.

Without a cent in his pocket he walked to Rapid City and enlisted in Company M, of the National Guard. He was fifty-seven years old but swore his age was forty-three. He became first sergeant of the company.

Company M, with the first two battalions of the First South Dakota, reached Manila Bay August 24, 1898. After six months' service at Manila, the regiment became a part of General MacArthur's army of invasion.

March 27, 1899, was the date of the fight of Marilao River. In the advance against the Filipinos, Preacher was shot through the center of the chest, a wound from which he was not to recover.

He was removed to a reserve hospital on the Pisig River and there died after a brave fight for life.



Author of "The Weasel and the Elephant," "North of Watling," etc.

JIM DONOVAN was a man who feared nothing under the heavens, yet there was a quickening of his pulse as he made his way along the narrow wooden boardwalk in the inky darkness. Slowly and cautiously he went, feeling ahead with each foot before he set it down. High overhead reared the main level of the old abandoned coal-dock, with its tracks that had once been used for coal-cars; a few feet beneath him gurgled black water; to left and right were wooden spiles and beams, with a bewildering crisscrossing of shoring timbers and braces.

Occasionally there sounded the faint scratch and patter of tiny feet as dock rats scurried off ahead of him, and once one of the repulsive scavengers brushed against his ankle as it streaked past. The lofty dock squeaked and groaned as it swayed in the night.

Twelve hundred feet the old dock stretched out into the drowsy river. Along both sides of the dock were moored ships, ancient, worn-out ships, waiting their turns to be broken up and sold as junk. Jim Donovan could not see them now, except as black shadows that shut him in on all sides; but he had studied them well before the darkness came, and had their types and locations roughly in mind. There were two schooners—a two and a four master; two high-sided steam freighters, sister ships; a white sound boat with its stack flat on deck and one paddle-box stove in; a coaster with a crumpled bow; and yes, even a square-rigger, stripped of its canvas, its masts and yards gaunt like the limbs of a skeleton.

And at the very end of the dock lay the largest vessel of them all, a four-hundred-foot intermediate passenger steamer that was not yet old enough to be scrapped, and was waiting for a possible buyer. This last vessel—the *Eastern Star* her name was—was the one for which Donovan was bound.

Of necessity he must go slow. Once a rotten plank grumbled beneath his foot and he teetered for a terrible instant over black, swirling water; then his fingers gripped an invisible beam and he drew himself to safety. Another time he slipped and butted his head against a crossbeam with a force that almost sent him to his knees.

A little later he heard a shuffling sort of sound ahead of him, and crouched low, his automatic in his hand and his eyes and ears straining to define the sound. But he did not hear it again, and after long, tense minutes he resumed his way, more cautiously than before, his automatic in his hand and ready for instant use.

At length he came to a point where the boardwalk turned at right angles; following the turn, he soon came to the dock's stringpiece, and found himself beside the *Eastern Star*, tall-sided, listed slightly and leaning against the dock as if she were tired, standing out black and silent against the dreary sky. He worked along the stringpiece till he came to an ordinary painter's ladder that went up at an angle. Donovan knew that

aboard the ship there was but one man, a shipkeeper or watchman. He shouted:

"Aboard the *Eastern Star!* Hello, there!"

His own voice startled him; it came back in a mocking echo from the high side of the old ship—"—lo, there!" No other answer came to him, and he called again, and still receiving no answer to his hail, started up the ladder.

Past one deck he climbed, then came to another, against the rail of which leaned the ladder. He swung over the rail and dropped to a broad deck which he judged to be the promenade deck. This deck was open to the sky and the darkness was not so acute as it had been beneath the dock. He saw an open door and entered a narrow corridor which was lined on both sides with doors, and he knew he was in the passenger quarters.

"Hello!" he shouted again. "Anybody there?"

Somewhere a door squeaked on rusty hinges. A tackle clacked in the wind. The ladder from the dock grated against the rail. There sounded the soft lap of wavelets against the ship's side. Only these sounds came to him; there was no answer to his shout.

HE WENT farther into the narrow corridor, till he was in total darkness, then he took out his pocket flashlight, which he had not cared to use while under the dock. With the white beam dancing before him he searched the passageway to the end, entered the dining saloon with its rows of tables and chairs. There were two doors, one on each side, and he found they were both locked; then he walked back into the corridor and made his way to the door by which he had entered. Shutting off his light, he stepped out upon the deck.

Here he hesitated, thinking. Where was the ship-keeper? Had he forsaken his trust and gone ashore? Perhaps he was asleep in the officers' quarters above, behind the bridge. With this thought in mind, he started toward the bridge ladder, which was forward from where he stood.

He rounded a ventilator—and came face to face with a man. A small figure of a man who seemed to cower in the shadow, and who was holding in one hand a big Colt revolver.

The man did not speak. He crouched silently, the big revolver describing wavering circles before him. He advanced a step, then retreated, then stopped, and Jim Donovan heard him sniff nervously and inhale with a peculiar whistling sound. The figure was hardly more than a shadow, yet Donovan sensed that the man was taut as wire, and that the finger on the trigger of the revolver was tensed and trembling.

"Steady, brother, steady!" warned Donovan.

The man lowered the weapon immediately. He seemed to relax, and Donovan heard him release his breath with a sort of muffled sob of relief. He put away his revolver and moved to one side the better to see Donovan, stared at him silently for some seconds, then nodded.

"You needn't be afraid of me," Donovan told him. "I just came aboard to have a chat with you."

Still the man did not speak. He shambled to the ship's side and looked down into the darkness between the ship and the dock. He could not possibly see anything, but he stared and stared, for a full minute; then he turned and came slowly back to the waiting Donovan.

"You needn't be afraid," repeated Donovan.

"I'm not afraid—now," returned the other, a quaver in his voice. "I was afraid, but I ain't now."

"You're the ship-keeper, aren't you? I came aboard to have a little chat with you. I used to be a seafaring man myself, and I like to talk with sailors."

"You came aboard alone? Did you—did you see anybody?"

"Alone, yes. And I saw no one."

"No." The ship-keeper shook his head. "No, you wouldn't see 'im. I never seen 'im either."

"Never saw who?" Donovan leaned forward the better to hear the other's murmured answer.

"I don't know. I never seen 'im, I tell you."

"But you hear him—is that it?"

"I hear 'im, yes."

The ship-keeper reached down and picked up a lantern from behind the ventilator. He fumbled about with it and after some seconds struck a match and applied it to the lantern's wick. He held the lantern on a level with his face as he regulated it, at the same time glancing beyond it at Donovan.

He was a little old man, this ship-keeper. His face was lined and seamed, and there was a stubble of gray beard on his cheeks and chin and throat. His eyes were sunk deep beneath bushy white eyebrows.

He shaded his eyes with one hand the better to see Donovan. He saw a stocky, square-jawed man with sharp, darting eyes and an aggressive mouth. He shook his head slowly as he peered.

"I don't know you," he muttered; then—"What did you say you came aboard for?"

Donovan told him again, then asked:

"Where do you sleep? Have you a room on the bridge-deck?"

The old man nodded, then made a gesture that Donovan was to follow him. He led the way to the bridge, then to a little room abaft the wheel-house. He hung his lantern on a hook on the wall and motioned Donovan to be seated on the low settee that ran the length of one side of the room.

Donovan ventured a friendly remark but the old man seemed not to hear. He sat on the edge of the lower berth and rocked slowly back and forth, pondering some matter that seemed to worry him. At length he put his head on one side and looked at Donovan, and when he spoke there was a hopeful sort of treble in his voice—

"Do you believe in ghosts sir?"

"No, I do not." Donovan smiled and slowly shook his head.

"Neither do I," said the old man quickly, and nodded his head rapidly. His entire body took on an air of assurance. "Neither do I. No, sir! I guess no ghost could stand up against my Colt, now, could they?"

"Hardly."

"They say seamen are superstitious. What do you think, sir?"

"That's a myth, pure and simple. Seamen are a hard-headed breed and not near as superstitious as landsmen. It's your old man who is born and raised by one fireside who is superstitious. Your real seaman sees too much of life to be afraid of shadows."

"That's just what I thought, sir! It's landsmen who are afraid of ghosts and such things. This dock-watchman, now— Do you know him, sir?"

"No; I've seen him, that's all."

"Well, he's got a little shanty just before you start out on the dock. He's a big battleship of a man, and ought'n' be scared of anything; but he tells me he wouldn't stay on this ship a minute if he was me."

"Why not?"

"Well, there's funny things happenin' about sir." The old man rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Footfalls and such, and doors openin', and—and—"

His voice trailed off and he seemed to be listening.

DONOVAN listened too. He heard the wind whispering through the rigging and about the deckhouses. Heard the lap of water and the grind of the ladder against the ship's rail. Then he heard another sound, which seemed to come from aft—*thump-thump, thump-thump.*

The old ship-keeper licked his dry lips and coughed before he could speak.

"Do you hear it, sir? Ain't them footfalls? Sometimes they're louder, and come from for'rd, or below."

"Sounds more like something swinging in the wind and bringing up with a thump," said Donovan. "I'll bet it's a smoke-stack guy jerking against the turnbuckle. That's what it is, a slack smoke-stack guy; it comes from that direction."

"Is it? Yeh, I guess you're right, sir. One of them guys is slack."

But he continued to listen, and it was a long time before he spoke again.

"There was three men killed a while back, sir," he said. Although the lantern was making the little room uncomfortably warm, he rose and closed the door. "About three weeks ago, it was. Maybe you heered about it?"

"I did hear something about it; read it in the papers." Donovan leaned forward interestedly. "But tell me about it."

"There were seven of 'em. They held up a mail-truck in Jersey City and beat it away in a big tourin' car. The papers says they cut open the sacks in some hide-out they had in Bayonne, but before they could divvie it up they had to beat it again in the tourin' car, with the most valuable of the stuff. I heered it was over a million dollars' worth."

"Twelve hundred thousand—the papers said," put in Donovan.

"Yeah? Well, they beat it from Bayonne to Port Johnson, and they must o' got mixed up; instead o' keepin' to the main road they swung down this way, toward the river.

Well, when they found out where they were they was afraid to turn 'round and go back, I guess, so they carted the loot out on the dock, in four mail-sacks.

"It was a murky sort o' night, somethin' like now. I seen 'em movin' 'round on top of the dock, but I couldn't make out what they was doin'.

"I guess you noticed I got a plank out from the bridge to the top o' the dock? No? Well, anyway, it's there; I use it so I can go ashore without goin' down under the dock. Well, I felt kind o' curious-like, so I goes over the plank to see what these fellers is doin'. I didn't know anything about any robbery, and I walks right up to 'em.

" 'Hello, mates,' says I. 'What's doin'?'

"Seems like they'd been watchin' me since I left the ship, and when I comes up they kind o' close in around me. Then I sees some lanterns bobbin' round towards the shore end o' the dock, and heered men callin' to one 'nother.

"But I don't see or hear anything else just then. Somethin' smacks me on the back o' my head and I goes down on my face. When I wakes up—I don't know how much later it was—there's a lot o' shootin' and runnin' about. Then in a little while it's over, and there ain't nobody around but some cops and detectives.

"Three o' them robbers was shot to death right here on the deck o' this ship. Three of 'em got away, in a little boat that was layin' 'longside the dock, and they took the mail-sacks o' loot with 'em, they say. Another of 'em was shot in the leg, and the cops found him hiding under the dock."

"And where was the dock-watchman all this time?" asked Donovan.

"That stiff? He was in his shanty. He wouldn't come out o' that shanty when there's anybody prowlin' around the dock. He ain't no watchman, he's a ornament. He admits it and says I'm a fool to be so —— conscientious."

"What do you do when you hear footfalls and these other noises you tell me about?"

"Me?" The ship-keeper scratched his chin. "Well, I goes after 'em. Me and my gun."

"Aren't you afraid? You're all alone out here, and it's pretty spooky with all these old ships around."

"Afraid? Sure, I'm afraid. Sometimes I'm so scared my legs feel like sticks o' boiled macaroni, they're so weak. But I goes anyhow."

The old man seemed glad to have company, and he answered freely the friendly questions Donovan put to him. How many hours was he on duty each day? Twenty-four hours; the line was "close," and they had made it a one-man job.

Food was delivered to him every other morning by a grocer in Port Johnson, half a mile away, with whom a standing order had been placed. When the ship-keeper was compelled to go to town he was supposed to leave word with the dock-watchman, who would keep an eye on the ship during his absence. But Johansen—that was the ship-keeper's name—hadn't been to town for over a month. Each Monday he made out a routine report and sent it to town by the grocer's man, to be mailed to the owners. Could he go ashore and no one miss him? Yes, easily; but he wasn't that kind of a man. His duty was to stay aboard and see that the vessel was not stripped by thieves; to slack or take in occasionally on the dock-lines as the ship surged with an extra high or low tide; to lower fenders overside should a passing tug or lighter threaten collision—and these things he did.

He had been ship-keeper on the *Eastern Star* for over a year. Yes, it was lonely; but he was used to being alone and didn't mind. For several years he had been holding down just such jobs as this; before that he had gone to sea as a sail-maker and carpenter. What did he do in his spare time? Or didn't he have any spare time? Yes, he had spare time, about eighteen hours a day of it; the six hours remaining he devoted to sleep. He read a lot, and thought—and wrote poetry! Wrote poetry about the old abandoned ships lying here in the "boneyard." He recited a few lines from memory:

> They bow and nod,
> In a manner odd;
> Just like old folks to me.

"Pretty good, ain't it?" he asked hopefully.

"As good as any I ever read," returned Donovan heartily. The truth was, he had never read any.

OLD Johansen spoke very feelingly of the ships about him. In his mind's eye he could see them bowing and nodding in the swells from passing vessels. They were like worn-out old people waiting to die.

He went on to say that the burly dock-watchman thought that he—Johansen—was crazy. He had been advised by the watchman to go ashore and get drunk once in a while, and the latter had offered to look after the ship while he was gone.

"I fired at a guy the other night," he said thoughtfully, fingering his wrinkled cheek. "Or maybe it was only a shadow. I dunno. I heered the footfalls, and when I went out seen somethin' movin' about on the foredeck, and plugged away at it. Mullins—the watchman up at the end of the dock—said next day that I was seein' things. I ain't sure now but what I was. You know how shadows move and squirm across the deck when a ship rolls."

Now and then he would stop talking and listen with his head on one side; and once he opened the door and put out his head.

"You don't hear anything, do you?" he inquired, turning slowly about.

Donovan shook his head. He heard nothing but the ordinary working of the vessel as she rolled lazily against the dock.

"I guess I didn't either, then," said Johansen; but he paused and listened again, and he was still listening as he returned to his seat.

"Funny how a thing like that gets you," he mused as he puffed absently at the cigar Donovan had given him. "Sometimes I sit here and I think I hear a noise. I say to myself, 'Now that ain't nothin' but a stay swingin' or some such thing,' and I try to forget it. I say that to myself over and over and over, but first thing I know I'm out there pokin' 'round with my gun in my hand. A man gets so after a while that he don't know what he hears and what he don't. That's why I didn't answer you when you hailed me a while ago; I didn't know whether I heered it or just thought I did. Funny, ain't it?"

"Nerves."

"Yeh, I guess so. I been kind o' edgy ever since I seen them three fellers layin' dead there on deck."

He looked up quickly as Donovan rose to his feet and began to button his coat.

"You ain't goin', sir? I was just about to say we go below to the galley, and I'd light the range and make some coffee and egg sandwiches. I enjoy your company, sir, and it ain't often I have somebody to chin with on a lonely job like this."

"I have to go, Johansen. I'll see you again some other night."

Donovan went to the door, but turned with his hand on the knob.

"Suppose you had trouble aboard, trouble that you couldn't handle alone, how would you call for help?"

"Well, if I had time, I'd burn a distress flare from the bridge, and either a police boat or a fire boat would come along to see what was what. Take 'em some time to get here, though. I guess I'd have to depend pretty much on myself and my old Colt, sir."

Johansen led him to the plank that spanned the space between the ship and the upper level of the dock. Here they shook hands heartily, and Donovan departed with a cheery word. The old man put the lantern on the rail and held the plank steady while Donovan crossed.

There was more light here than below the dock, and Donovan made better time as he walked toward the shore end. He had gone a hundred yards when he turned and looked back. Old Johansen, lantern in hand, was still standing where he had left him, and, though Donovan could not be sure at the distance, seemed to be listening with his head on one side.

At the beginning of the dock he found the watchman's shanty, and looked in. At a table beneath a smoky oil lamp a man was eating something from a tin pie-plate. He started violently as he looked up and saw Donovan standing in the doorway. He gulped down a mouthful of food, then blurted out—

"Who the —— are you?"

"I'm just a sight-seer," answered Donovan calmly.

"——! Fine time to be seein' the sights! Why don't you make some noise when you come around like that? Sneakin' up on a guy with rubber heels! I mighta plugged you!"

"I'm sorry. I came down late this afternoon to look over these old ships just out of curiosity, and it got dark on me while I was talking to the ship-keeper on the *Eastern Star*."

"You was talkin' to Johansen, was you? What'd he have to say?"

"Oh, nothing in particular. We were talking about ships and things, and what a lonely job he has."

Mullins peered at him suspiciously for

some seconds, then turned to his pie-plate of food.

"He's a nut, Johansen is," he growled. "Been alone too long. He's got the tanker blues; d'you know what that is?"

"I'm not sure that I do."

"Well, the men in oil tankers get it—if they stay in 'em too long. Them tankers come into port in the morning in some out-o'-the-way place miles from any town, and in the afternoon they're at sea again. The men in 'em don't get hardly any shore leave, and after a while they go nuts from looking at the same faces all the time. After a guy's been in one for a half-dozen years he's fit for a padded cell. Johansen was in a tanker nine years. And after he left the sea he took hold o' lonely jobs like the one he's got now.

"With me it's different," the burly watchman went on. "There's two of us on this job, watch and watch. The other guy's on from eight in the morning to eight at night, and all day I'm home in my boarding house, or runnin' around with my bunch."

"So you think Johansen isn't quite sane?"

"Sane? ——, he's crazy as a billy-goat. The other night he stands up on the bridge and throws three slugs into an oil barrel down on the foredeck. D'you call a bloke like that sane? He's like the guy that slept one night in a haunted house, on a bet. He wakes up about midnight and thinks he sees a hand wavin' around down at the foot o' the bed, and he pulls his gun from under the piller and shoots off three of 'is toes. That's the way that nut Johansen was, shootin' at a oil barrel, and always hearin' things. He's got the tanker blues, got it bad, and he ain't gonna get any better as long as he sticks to that ship the way he does. He's too darn conscientious."

"Perhaps he's saving his money."

"That's what he's doin' all right. He tells me he needs three thousand bucks more to open up some kind of a awning shop in Newark. He's a nut if there ever was one—Oh, you goin'? So long."

"Yes; I have to get home. Good night, watchman."

BUT Donovan did not go home. He walked along the railroad tressel which ran toward the town, till he was out of sight of the watchman; then he turned and came cautiously back, and re-entered the dock from the lower level. When he was fifty feet from the shore, he stopped and softly whistled a bar of "John Brown's Body." As he finished a shadow glided from behind a spile, and a guarded voice called—

"That you, Jim?"

"Yes; it's all right, Frank. Did Chick Glover come back?"

"No; he's still out on the dock some place. Two more of 'em came down and went out after Chick. Deathhouse Freeney was one of 'em, but I couldn't make out the other."

"Must have been Goldman."

"Must have. What's the word, Jim?"

"Looks good, though I can't just figure it out. There's a queer twist to it that I can't quite straighten out. You hurry up to town, Frank, and get the others started down. Let them come out on the dock as far as they can and wait for the signal."

"What's the signal?"

"A flare from the bridge of the ship, if you don't hear my gun before that. Or maybe I'll just flash my light a couple of times. I'll have to see how things shape up. Keep your eye on the bridge."

"All right, boss. I'm off for town."

The shadow faded away and was gone, and Donovan, his hand on the automatic in his pocket, went on toward the off-shore end of the dock. Hollow footfalls sounded overhead, and he looked up. Through the cracks between the planking of the upper level he saw the glimmer of a lantern.

Donovan felt his way along till he came to one of the rough flights of steps that here and there connected the dock's upper and lower levels, and went up as quickly as he dared, and as silently as he could. The light was some hundred feet ahead of him when he reached the upper level, and he started after it, but at that instant it blinked out.

Donovan was in a quandary now. Had the burly watchman suspected that he was being followed, and had he doused his lantern with the intention of returning and catching his shadower unawares? And then, as Donovan, crouching low, hesitated, he saw against the sky the big watchman's form, still going toward the *Eastern Star*, at the end of the dock. A moment later the watchman disappeared in the shadow of the ship's superstructure.

Donovan started forward again, all senses alert. A hundred feet from the ship,

he stopped suddenly. From below had come the murmur of low voices. There was silence for a while, then came the murmur again. The speakers seemed directly beneath him, and were headed toward the ship. He tried to distinguish the words, but couldn't, and, a slanting smile on his lips, went on toward the ship almost at a run, so as to reach the vessel ahead of the men on the lower level.

At the end of the dock he halted in dismay. The plank between the upper level and the *Eastern Star's* bridge rail had been drawn aboard the ship. If he went below to use the ladder he would likely run into the men he was trying to avoid.

He measured the distance between ship and dock with a speculative eye. The ship's rail, slightly lower than the dock, was about twelve feet distant; not a great jump but difficult considering the darkness and the uncertain take-off.

He nodded grimly, stepped back several paces, took a short run and leaped into the air. He caught hold of an iron stanchion, whirled once completely about it, and landed heavily on the broad wooden rail; then he dropped easily to the bridge deck and made his way to the ship-keeper's room.

He found the door open and the little room dark and unoccupied. He turned away and was about to go below when he saw a dark figure step out of the wheelhouse and come to a sudden stop.

"That you, Johansen?" called Donovan in a low voice.

There was no answer for a moment; then:

"Oh, it's you, is it, sir? You come back again?"

"Yes. Has anybody been aboard?"

"I dunno, sir. I been hearin' 'em again. Yes, sir, I been hearin' them footfalls. Just a while ago they started. I put out my light and started to look around, me and my Colt. Then I heard a thump on the bridge and I come through the wheelhouse to see what it was. I guess it was you, sir?"

"Yes, it was me."

Johansen appeared to listen for a moment.

"I don't hear them footfalls now," he mumbled; then, "You said you don't believe in ghosts, didn't you, sir?"

"I certainly do not."

"Neither do I!" said the old man fiercely. "It's funny, though," he added thoughtfully. "Them footfalls sounded like they was down below, maybe on the saloon deck. You know how far you can hear a little thump like a footfall in an empty ship. Maybe it's the ship working; but how am I to know whether it is or not? It sounds just like somebody walking, and the only thing for me to do is go take a look. I couldn't sleep easy if I didn't."

"Suppose you and I go look together?"

"Will you, sir? Well, that's mighty fine of you—"

Johansen suddenly left off, and held his lantern on a level with Donovan's face. There was puzzlement and a glimmer of suspicion in the old man's eyes as he peered.

"You suspect that I'm more than a casual visitor; is that it?" asked Donovan. "Well, you're right. Listen—" And he leaned close and spoke steadily for some minutes, then showed the old man some papers in the light of the lantern. "Satisfied?" he asked then.

"Yes, sir!" answered Johansen, with a vigorous nod. "Thought you was more'n you let on. You and me'll go look for them footfalls together, sir."

They left the bridge and went below to the promenade deck, then, walking stealthily, descended to the saloon deck, where the old ship-keeper stopped suddenly and stared wide-eyed at the black rectangle of an open door.

"That was closed—that door!" he whispered hoarsely. "I closed it myself an hour ago."

"Where does it lead to?"

"It opens right into the engine-room trunk. There's a grating there, and a ladder that goes down into the engine-room."

"Well, if the door was closed an hour ago, and now it's open, somebody must have opened it. That sounds like logic to me, Johansen. And the gent who opened it must be somewhere inside. You and I will follow and—"

HE BROKE off and swung about upon Johansen. The old man had suddenly straightened and was fumbling with his big revolver, which he carried in the waistband of his dungaree trousers. With a shaking hand the ship-keeper pointed at the ladder which leaned against the ship's side and rested upon the lower level of the dock. The slender ladder was shaking as if some one were coming up.

"Where can we hide?" asked Donovan quickly.

Johansen stepped quickly into the engine-room trunk and motioned Donovan to follow. He took his visitor by the arm and guided him through the darkness, over an iron grating with a smooth, round handrail at one side, around a corner and over a door sill. Far below them was the ship's engine-room, and as Donovan glanced down he saw a bobbing light and an indistinct figure—a lantern swinging in the hand of a man.

Johansen saw the light at the same instant. He made a queer gasping noise, then swung about and tried to bring his weapon to bear on the figure below. But Donovan clutched him and forced him back.

"It's him," breathed Johansen. "It's him! Look out! Let me pot 'im!"

"No, no!" Donovan kept a firm grip on Johansen's pistol hand and twisted the old man away from the door. "That's the dock-watchman—Mullins."

"Mullins? Mullins? What's he doin' aboard this ship?"

"That's what we want to find out. I saw him on the dock, coming this way. Before he reached here he put out his lantern, so you couldn't see him.

"By the way, where was Mullins the night of the fight between the police and the robbers?" asked Donovan.

"Him? He was in his shanty, of course."

"How do you know he was?"

"He told me so. Said he saw them fightin', but had better sense than to get mixed up in it."

"I see."

Together they crouched in the darkness. The sky was clearing, and a moonbeam came through a port and slanted across the engine-room trunk. The ladder creaked against the rail as it bent to the weight of whoever was coming up it. Johansen, hiding with Donovan in the little tool-room, wet his lips with a smacking noise as he heard the thud of some one dropping to the deck outside. There came another thud, and another.

"Three of them," whispered Johansen.

"Three is right."

"Right? 'Tain't right, either. They ain't got no right aboard this ship. I'm goin' out and chase 'em off. S' help me, if they think I'm afraid of them—"

Donovan heard Johansen getting to his feet, and reached out and caught him by the shoulder.

"Stay here! It's all right," he said, and something in his voice made Johansen do as he was told.

"Gosh!" he mumbled. "I don't like this. What's that stiff doin' below there, anyhow?"

"I don't know. I have an idea, but I'm not sure it's right."

"And how about them three outside?"

"We'll find out about them soon enough."

"And how about you?" There was sudden suspicion in the old man's quavering voice. "I liked your face right off, and you seem like a feller a man could steer by, but—but—why—"

"Ssh!"

Shoes clanged on the iron grating by the entrance. The beam of an electric flashlight darted out and an oval of light danced here and there about the sides of the trunk. Another flashlight beam joined the first as the men came nearer.

"How d'you get in the —— fire-room?" growled one.

"How d'you think I know?" answered another. "There's a ladder there, goin' down to the engine-room, I guess. There must be a door between the engine-room and the fire-room."

"Yeah? Well, let's shake it up and get it over with. A guy could fall down one of these —— ladders and break his back. And if somebody sees our car parked out there in that lot by the end of the dock they're goin' to start asking questions. We slipped up once, and once is enough."

The third man chuckled.

"That slip-up was a good thing for us, Deathhouse. A three-way split is better than a seven-way split any time."

"That's no lie," answered the other.

They passed within arm's length of Donovan and Johansen, hiding in the tool-room, came to the top of the iron ladder and began to descend into the engine-room. They reached the bottom of the ladder, crossed another grating, and started down another ladder.

Donovan and Johansen stepped from their hiding place out upon the upper grating. The three men were now far below them. The watchman with his lantern had disappeared, probably in the fire-room.

"What now?" asked Johansen.

Donovan thought quickly.

"I tell you what: You go to the bridge and burn a flare. Is there any other way they can get out of the fire-room?"

"H'mm—yeah. They can go up the fire-room fiddley to the topside."

"Well, it's your job to guard that fiddley. Light your flare and fasten it somewhere on the bridge, so you won't need to stay there and hold it. Then stand by the fiddley-hatch and don't let anybody out."

"Shall I—shall I—"

"Yes; use your gun if you have to—and shoot to kill! If one of those fellows beats you to it with his gun, you may just as well get in touch with your favorite undertaker!"

"I'll keep 'em in the fiddley, all right." Old Johansen's voice was a weak treble, but there was a stubborn, determined note to it. "I don't know why I'm taking orders from you, but somehow I kind o' think you're all right."

"I *am* all right," Donovan assured him.

The ship-keeper shuffled along the grating and went out the door.

WHEN the men had flashed their lights about, Donovan had observed closely the position of the engine-room ladders, and had the information well in mind. He felt his way to the first ladder and went stealthily down. By the time he reached the lower grating the three men had disappeared—into the fire-room, probably. He stole across the grating, felt about till his hand found the hand-rail of the lower ladder, and started down. From the door that opened into the fire-room came a faint yellow light, seemingly the light of a lantern.

He stopped in the darkness at the foot of the ladder and peered into the dimly lighted fire-room.

The lantern was hooked to the latch of one of the fireboxes. It shed its yellow rays on four men—and, lying on the floorplates, four mail-sacks! One of the men was the big dock-watchman, and he had his hands in the air, while another man, a slender fellow in a checked suit, was holding the muzzle of a black automatic against the watchman's ribs.

"If I'm not regular, what d'you think I kept my mouth closed for?" the watchman was saying. He looked nervously at the three men. "I was under the dock the night you guys had the run-in with the cops. I saw it all, but I didn't butt in. I saw you take the sacks aboard this ship, but I didn't know what you did with 'em. I knew you didn't have 'em in the boat when you made your get-away. Ever since then I been scoutin' around this ship almost every night, lookin' for the sacks. It wasn't till tonight that I figured you must 'a' dropped 'em down the fire-room ventilator. That was a good one all right. And the cops been huntin' all over the country for it, thinkin' you took it with you in the boat! But I'm a regular guy and I kept my mouth shut. The other night I almost got shot up by that crazy ship-keeper, Johansen. He threw three slugs so close to me that I could hear 'em whiz."

"You're regular, I guess," said the lean man, putting down his weapon and casually moving behind Mullins.

"Sure I am."

The slender man had slipped his pistol into his shoulder holster and was fumbling in his coat pocket.

"And I kept my mouth shut," added Mullins. "I ain't no stool—"

Smack! Mullins fell flat on his face. The slender man slipped his blackjack back into his pocket and grinned at the others.

"It won't hurt the big boob to keep his mouth shut a little longer," he said calmly.

"Well, come on; let's snap into it," he said quickly. "Let's get this stuff off the ship and into the machine. You're the biggest and huskiest, Deathhouse; you take two sacks and Goldman and I'll each take one."

"Gotcha, Chick."

Deathhouse, a big, low-browed tough with a nose slewed to one side and a white scar on his chin, swung two sacks to his shoulder and made a motion to start toward the door to the engine-room.

"Come on, youse two."

"Get yours, Goldman," ordered Chick, the slender man, who seemed to be the brains of the three.

Goldman was nearly as big and husky as Deathhouse. Instead of taking one mail-sack, he took both.

"I got 'em, Chick," he said. "You bring that dumb-bell's lantern and light the way for us, huh?"

"Go ahead," said Chick.

He reached to take the lantern from the door-latch upon which it hung.

"Put 'em up, boys! Steady—steady—"

In the doorway stood Donovan, automatic in one hand and flashlight ready for use in the other.

Chick, the slender leader, moved like a flash. His pistol seemed to leap from its holster beneath his arm, and the barrel swung and crashed against the lantern, which leaped from its place and rolled over and over on the floorplates, went out, plunging the fire-room in total darkness. Chick's pistol and Donovan's exploded together, and Donovan felt a shock in his left hand as the bandit's bullet tore the flashlight from his grasp. Donovan leaped backward through the doorway, out of the line of fire, and sent two bullets at random into the fire-room.

Chick's hitting the flashlight had been nothing more than a lucky shot, but it completely ruined Donovan's plan of action. The fight from now on would be any one's, with the odds in favor of the bandits; Donovan was not only handicapped by the darkness but was outnumbered three to one.

"Who the —— is it?" came Deathhouse's booming voice.

"It's that —— Donovan, the government dick," said Chick. "We didn't give him the slip today after all."

"Let's rush 'im," rumbled Deathhouse.

"Wait a minute. Hey, you Donovan," called Chick, "stand aside, or we'll fill you full of lead."

"I haven't been trailing you for three weeks to stand aside now," retorted the detective. "You led me to the loot, and now the game's up. You had better be nice and stay where you are. I'm standing right here by the door, and I wouldn't move an inch out of the way if you had your gun against my chest. You know me, Chick."

"Let's rush 'im," repeated Deathhouse again.

"Yeah, come on," put in Goldman. "He's all alone."

The beam of a flashlight shot through the doorway. Donovan fired to the left of the light, then to the right. There was a grunt and a curse from the engine-room, then the light blinked out. A streak of orange flame stabbed the darkness and a bullet sang through the doorway, not a foot from his head. For a tiny fraction of a second the room was illuminated by the explosion, and he saw that the three bandits were coming at a run, bent low. He fired at the foremost and was rewarded by a cough and the sound of a falling body. Donovan heard the two others scrambling for cover.

"DID he get you again, Goldman?" The voice was Deathhouse's. "Hey, Goldman!" A pause, then: "Hey, Chick, the —— got Goldman. Goldman's croaked. What're we goin' to do?"

"I don't know— Say! Is that you, Deathhouse?"

"Me? Where?"

"Just brushed against me!"

"No; it must be that watch—"

"Hold on, watchman!" cried Chick. "I got my gat against your backbone!"

"Don't shoot." The big watchman, recovering consciousness, had tried to creep away. "Don't shoot," he cried again.

"Don't wiggle, then. Listen—" Chick's voice died to a murmur.

Donovan, in the engine-room, on one knee, had his left arm across the doorway, so that no one could get through without him knowing it, and in his right hand he held his automatic. His sole idea now was to hold the bandits till help arrived. He heard them moving about and suspected that the watchman, with Chick's pistol at his back, was leading them to the fiddley ladder, which went straight up to the superstructure deck. He fired into the fire-room, thinking that the flash would enable him to see what was happening. But he could not make out whether the objects on the floorplates were men or mail-sacks—or men behind mail-sacks.

And then a strange thing happened. A faint rosy glow appeared in the upper part of the fire-room. The glow brightened and spread, and the shadows began to fall back. Brighter grew the light, and brighter. It changed from rose to red. Now Donovan could see into every corner.

A broad passage ran between two rows of boilers and fireboxes. At the far end of the passage stood Chick, Deathhouse and Mullins. They were standing as if petrified, and each was looking up. The red glow came from a wide round opening directly over their heads, and up through this opening ran the fiddley ladder. Mullins had one foot on the ladder. In the center of the broad passage, sprawled across two mail-sacks, lay Goldman.

Down out of the round opening, which was the fire-room fiddley, seemed to float a

ball of fire. It descended till it was about ten feet above the floorplates, then stopped.

Chick Glover leaped to one side, and threw up his gun. Twice he fired, and each time the ball of fire leaped into the air. But it did not go out; it flamed higher, and threw off a shower of sparks.

High above Chick a gun boomed hollowly, and a bullet clanged against the iron floorplates a few feet from Chick. He jumped to one side and fired again at the ball of fire. It leaped and flamed higher still, as if to mock him.

Mullins, the watchman, had got out from under the fiddley and was cowering in a corner. Deathhouse, his gun in his hand and a ghastly snarl on his face, had backed against the farther bulkhead. Chick Glover turned completely around, and strained this way and that, as if undecided whether to try conclusions with Donovan or with the unseen marksman above.

In the engine-room, many feet were clanging on the ladders and gratings, and a half-dozen lanterns were coming from above. Donovan leaned around the edge of the doorway and lined the sights of his pistol on Chick.

"Drop it, Chick! I'll ruin you if you don't. You too, Deathhouse. Drop 'em, both of you! Ah, that's the stuff! Now keep your hands in the air. And you, watchman, stay right where you are."

Chick and Deathhouse had thrown down their weapons and were holding their hands over their heads. Donovan stepped into the fire-room, his automatic ready, and after him came a half score detectives and uniformed policemen. Down the ladder came old Johansen, his big Colt stuck in his waistband.

"Got 'em, didn't we?" he squeaked excitedly. "Me and my Colt helped some, hey?"

"You bet you did," answered Donovan approvingly. "They might have got away if it hadn't been for you. And that ball of fire thing—what is it?"

"Cotton waste soaked in kerosene and hung on wire," replied the ship-keeper. "Pretty slick, hey?"

"It sure did the trick"

"Maybe the owners will raise my pay for this. D'you think they will?"

"Never mind that," said Donovan. "There's a big reward out for these fellows, and I'll see that you get your share of it. I guess you can go pick out a location for that awning business."

"Oh, you know about that, do you? Gosh, that's what I want, all right."

The dead man, Goldman, had already been carried out of the fire-room. Chick and Deathhouse, handcuffed together, were being led away. A detective approached Mullins and looked inquiringly toward Donovan.

"Yes, him too," answered Donovan. "He was caught with the goods. It's not up to us to decide how guilty he is. Take him along."

"Wait a minute before you put the irons on 'im," cried Johansen; and turning to Donovan, "He's the footfall guy, ain't he?"

"He's it, yes."

"Well—" The little old ship-keeper stepped in front of the big watchman and looked up at him. He suddenly leaped into the air and drove his skinny fist against the watchman's nose. "That's for keepin' me awake nights, you big bum! He who laffs las' laffs las'!"

It sounded like one word.

Mullins, his nose streaming blood, started forward. Johansen struck a fighting pose and put out his gray-whiskered chin aggressively.

"Come on! Come on! I can lick any landlubber of a watchman that ever lived. Allus could. Come on!"

But Mullins didn't "come on." His nose was giving him considerable trouble, and he stood meekly while handcuffs were snapped on his wrists.

"Well, sir, I'm glad of one thing," said Johansen as he fell in beside Donovan and started for the engine-room; "them footfalls is gone. They sure was a darn nuisance."

WHITE FALCON by HAROLD LAMB

Author of "Bogatyr," "The Snow Driver," etc.

CHAPTER I

About the White City are three walls.

Within the earth wall dwell the slaves—within the red wall the men-at-arms guard the palaces of the peers.

In the heart of the city, within the white wall, sleeps one who is master of all.

Yet his sleep is broken and he himself is no more than a slave to Fear.

THE sentry at the Gora gate of the city of Moscow was a good soldier. He knew the four duties of the guard, because his sergeant had instructed him carefully and he had repeated them until he remembered them.

To bow the head before rank, to drive away vagabonds, to hand over any coins given him to his sergeant, and—unless some extraordinary event befell—on no account to call the captain of the guard who, at this hour of a cloudless midsummer day, was asleep in the cool ante-room of the gate tower. The sergeant was not in evidence because he was making his rounds which led him, to the best of the sentry's belief, through several near-by taverns and took up a great deal of time.

So the sentry had the gate to himself. In the warlike days of Tsar Ivan the Terrible this would not have been the case. But the new Tsar, Boris Godunov, was a different sort. He cared more for the trade caravans that entered the gates of Moscow than for the warriors who guarded the gates.

Leaning on his halberd, the sentry watched a file of dusty ox-carts pass between the towers into the city. Some of the bales smelled deliciously of tea; the wooden casks reeked of oil or wine. God alone knew whence they came—perhaps from the land of the Great Moghul, perhaps from Cathay—but the sentry knew they were going into the Kremyl of Boris Godunov.

Suddenly he stepped forward and lowered his weapon across the open half of the gate.

"Hi there, my fine fellows, just pull in your reins a moment!"

The last of the ox-carts had rumbled by, and through the pall of dust three horsemen appeared, riding abreast. They looked, at first glance, like vagabonds.

Their sheepskin coats and embroidered linen shirts were rent and weather-stained. No baggage followed them in carts and no servants went before with staves.

One of them, with a good-humored, sunburned face, was the heaviest man the sentry had ever seen astride a horse. The rider in the center wore no sword and was very old; white mustaches hung down from lined, hollow cheeks. The youngest of the three was beautiful as a prince's son. The hilt of his sword was gold, with a circle of pearls on the pommel, and the sword curved like a bent bow.

This puzzled the sentry, because in Moscow such a sword would be worn by a high officer, not by a boy. And the boots of the

"White Falcon," copyright, 1925, by Harold Lamb.

three were of shining red morocco—their horses excellent and well cared for; they held their heads high—undoubtedly in some respects these men were like *boyars*—nobles.

"Come now," he said pacifically, "tell me your names and the mission upon which you ride."

Easing his weight from one stirrup to the other, the stout rider considered him from restless black eyes. The sentry wore the long black coat with red facings of the Moscow *strelsui*, the town guard. His beard was cut as square as the toes of his cowhide shoes, and there was not too much rust on his iron morion or his halberd head.

"I am Ayub the Zaporoghian," the big man said, "from the steppe—"

"What is that?" demanded the Muscovite alertly.

"Eh, Rusty, don't you know?" Ayub rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well, it's like this. The devil will not enter the lands of the good Muscovites, because you've built churches everywhere. But even the devil has to exercise his horses, so he made a great plain just beyond the frontier. He took away all the mountains so his stallions would not try to jump too high, and he cut down all the trees so the fire from their nostrils would not start a blaze. That's the steppe, and that's why you won't find anything there except a lot of wild horses and the Horned One himself, of nights."

In the opinion of the sentry the frontier of which Ayub spoke was a haunt of outlaws and evil spirits, with hordes of Tatars and Turks—what lay beyond the border he could not imagine.

"What is your mission in Moscow?" he asked.

"We have come to Holy Mother Moscow of the White Walls to see our brothers who are the best warriors of the Tsar, because they are Cossacks like us."

Now the sentry had never set eyes on a Cossack before, and knew of no such warriors in the service of the Tsar Boris Godunov. And he could not decide whether to admit the three wanderers or bar them out.

"How many brothers have you, good sir?" he pondered.

"Five hundred. They are the *Donskoi*—the Don men."

Upon further reflection the sentry decided to awaken his captain.

BEARDED to the eyes, clumping along in clumsy boots, the *starosta* of the guard emerged from one of the towers and yawned heartily. The three Cossacks took off their tall lambskin hats politely and he ceased yawning. Every head was shaved to the peak of the skull, from which dangled a long scalplock.

"Oho," he said, "you are Cossacks from down below. What master do you serve?"

Seeing that Ayub was growing red with anger at the delay and questioning, the youngest reined his piebald pony forward and spoke respectfully—though he did not dismount to address the *starosta*.

"We serve no one. We seek permission to enter to rest our horses and refresh ourselves."

"Well, what regiment are you from? Are you from the light cavalry that has been scouring the Don River of its filth?"

"Captain, we come not from the emperor's service. Nor do we know where your cavalry has quested. For years we have been beyond the border at the courts of Eastern kings."

"What is your name, youngling?"

"Kirdy is my name. And this old one, my grandsire, is Khlit who is a *bogatyr* of the border."

The officer of the guard put his hands on his hips and shook his head as the sentry had done. A *bogatyr* was a hero warrior, whose name was handed down in legends. Always the *bogatyri* had been princes of the throne, and the warrior with the thin, dark face and the white beard that fell to his chest was not even a noble. "Nay," he muttered, "I think you are lying—"

The oldest of the Cossacks—he called Khlit—urged his horse suddenly between the captain and Kirdy. A veined hand closed on the wrist of the youth who had snatched at his sword hilt, his black eyes blazing.

"This is a lofty threshold, my falcon," he growled in a speech the Muscovites did not understand. "*Kabar-dar*—walk your horse slowly here, looking to right and left, saying nothing without thinking three times."

The boy who wore the white camel's-hide cloak dropped his eyes and took his hand from his sword, and after a moment Khlit turned to the officer.

"You of the guard," he said bluntly, "be

at peace. We wish to enter to speak with our brothers."

"Are they royalty?" The Muscovite essayed a jest.

"Aye, by —— they are!" cried Ayub. "They are the *Donskoi*—the Cossacks of the Don. Upon the road I heard that my brother-in-arms, Demid, is in Moscow. Even the tavern keepers up this way have heard of his deeds because he is chief of the Don men. With five hundred of his falcons he is visiting Moscow, so we drew our reins hither. I have not drunk a cup with Demid for two harvests."

The eyes of the *starosta* changed and he glanced at the sentry who was staring, slack-jawed.

"So, my masters, you wish to be quartered with the *Donskoi?*"

"Aye, where is their barrack? Do they serve the Tsar?"

Until now Ayub had been doubtful whether they would find his friends in this gigantic city of the Muscovites. He did not understand why Demid, who had been a chief on the border, had taken service with the lord of Muscovy. But now the captain said it was so and he was relieved that his long ride had not been in vain. In another hour he would be drinking the health of his former companions, and not in mead but in fine sparkling wine or heady spirits.

"Well, my wanderers, if you are truly friends of the *Donskoi* you may enter," responded the officer readily. "All Moscow has heard of their deeds and every honest man has gone to look at the heroes. You will find them easily."

"I warrant they are quartered with the best of your warriors," granted Ayub.

"Aye, that is truth. Go to the gate of Saint Nicholas—pass through the red and white walls, to the citadel, the Kremyl itself. Only ask for the Don Cossacks and you will be shown the way. They await the pleasure of the Tsar's majesty."

"God be with you," said Ayub, mollified, "you have a civil tongue in a dog's face. I don't see why Demid wanted service with farmers, but he always was a devil for rooting into dark places."

When they trotted past, the florid cheeks of the *starosta* grew ruddier still and his beard twitched in a silent laugh. The halberdier, seeing the good humor of his officer, was gratified because he would not be flogged for waking up the captain.

THE three Cossacks kept abreast as they entered the environs of the city, and gazed curiously at the scattered barracks of the militia amid the hovels of the peasantry. Here and there arose the walled pile of a monastery with only embrasures to let in the light of day.

Within the *Kitai-gorod* with its red brick wall the wanderers found a different city. Here the houses formed irregular streets and foreign merchants hung out their signs. Covered stalls of harness-makers and silver and goldsmiths almost touched the flanks of their horses. But the street underfoot, even though timbers had been laid on it, was fetlock deep in mud, and the sun beat down on damp earth and piles of filth.

"Only look yonder," cried Ayub, "surely there is the father of all churches. How it shines!"

It was the great church of Vasili the Blest that had caught his eye—a bulbed spire rising from a nest of ten cupolas, all different and all resplendent in varying colors—red, gold and white.

They moved on, scattering the mob of beggars that clutched at their knees and the pack of dogs that snarled and fought at the heels of the beggars. The horses shied at a body that lay half buried in the mud—a mere skeleton of a man black with flies where the skin showed through the rags.

Ayub tossed a handful of silver among the mendicants, but the half-starved pack only clamored the more until a three-horse carriage of a noble trotted through the narrow street, with servants running before to clear the way. The Cossacks drew aside, taking note of the *boyar's* green kaftan trimmed with sables, of the silver eagle on his breast, and the fine belt of Siberian silver fox. He rested his hands on the gold hilt of a long sword and looked neither to right or left.

As the carriage passed, an odor of amber and musk swept away for a moment the stench of drying mud and uncleansed human flesh.

"Is that one the Tsar," Ayub asked the tavern woman who set brandy before them, "or one of his lord-colonels?"

The Cossacks had rubbed down their ponies and spread hay before them in the stable yard, and not until this was done had they hastened into the tap-room.

"Nay, good sir, that is a member of the *okolnitchi*."

"Of what, lass?" demanded Ayub, draining his glass and sucking his mustache.

"The men who follow the Tsar."

"Well, aren't they the greatest nobles in all this part of the world?"

The big Cossack glanced around and beheld dark faces under spotless turbans—Armenian and Turkoman merchants quaffing forbidden wine in the city of infidels—broad white faces and drab velvets of traders from the North.

"Some are great nobles, some are different. All is otherwise now."

"How otherwise?" demanded the Zaporoghian, who was impatient of half truths. "More brandy, wench—nay, bring the cask. Here are gold ducats. Bear a glass to every one in this room. We are Cossacks and Satan himself never saw us drink in a corner."

Whether the sight of gold heartened her—who had been skeptical of their worn garments—or whether Ayub's ignorance reassured her, the thin-cheeked woman in the soiled kerchief set the spirits before him and bent close, as if to wipe the table that bore no evidence of such care.

"The angels bless you, good sirs! Do you not know? Ever since the old Tsar died and the new father sits in his place there has been a curse on the land."

"What curse?" Ayub asked, interested.

"Every year since *it* happened drouth has destroyed the harvests, and we have had little food. Only today they carried out a hundred and five bodies in wagons to the burial ground."

Khlit's gray eyes searched the woman's face casually. He had noticed the cortège with its sad burden while Ayub was arguing with the guard at the gate. But famine stalked through more than one land in these evil times.

"Such things have happened before." The woman's tongue once loosened, must needs tell the full story of wo. "Yet here the black plague has been among us. They do say it is worst where the—the new Tsar lies."

"*Na,*" muttered Ayub, fortified by his fourth glass, "even the Turks have the plague."

"Whenever the—the wise Tsar rides forth," went on the tavern keeper, "they ring the bells, real fine. But it ain't a joyful sound the bells make. No matter how the monks pull the ropes, the sound always comes out the same. The bells ring a dirge. It's been like that since *it* happened."

"Eh, that's bad," nodded Ayub seriously. "That's an omen, wench, and not to be spit upon. When your horse stumbles, look out, because you'll meet wo. If you hear vampires crying in the trees a woman will steal your purse or Jews get you in debt. That's the way of it. Well, here's health to the Tsar Ivan the Terrible!"

Leaning closer, the tavern keeper clutched at his glass.

"Nay, where have you been, good sir, that you do not know. The great Ivan lies in his shroud these long years and Boris Godunov is Tsar."

To Ayub who only knew the Tsar as the ruler of the Northern folk—merchants, nobles, and soldiery—this mattered not at all. All his attention was centered in assuaging a month-old thirst, while his two companions were drinking sparingly. For years they had lived in the saddle on the steppes of Asia and they were wary of this great city with its triple walls, its caravan of the dead and its bells that only sounded a dirge, no matter how men pulled at the ropes.

"Ivan Grodznoi was the friend of the Don Cossacks," assented Ayub presently. "God grant that this son of his, Boris, be the same."

Hereat the pinched lips of the woman opened in a sigh.

"Along of the new Tsar the curse came upon the land. I've heard tell that Boris is not the son of Ivan, only his councilor. Ivan was to him like a father. And then—the old Tsar Ivan *had* a son, my masters, a strong boy Dmitri. Now Boris Godunov sent the little Dmitri away to live on a distant estate and there a son of one of the *okolnitchi* slew the prince with a knife. Men say that the death of Dmitri lies at the door of Boris Godunov. But now he is Tsar."

Behind the tap-room a tumult arose, and the woman started in sudden dread that changed to relief when she heard snarling, snapping and yelping of dogs and the shouts of men. Ayub's curiosity was aroused and he ceased to think of Tsars and the curse that was upon Muscovy. He was lurching to his feet when the woman whispered again.

"*Ai-a,* where are the noble lords going?

Isn't the brandy good? Few taverns have such brandy, now. Besides, my daughter has not seen the noble lords. She's a fine girl, and I don't allow her to come down here for common folk to gaze on."

She could not take her eyes from the heavy pouch that swung at Ayub's girdle.

"Is she pretty, your daughter?" muttered the Zaporoghian. "We'll come back and look at her then, the timid flower! Here!"

He tossed gold ducats down on the table to the value of several casks of brandy and strode out the door, his silver heels sinking deep into the sand, and promptly forgot all about the tavern-keeper's girl.

But the woman was before him at the door, bowing.

"*Ai-a*, the noble princes are strangers—evil will assuredly happen to them if they go out in the streets. Thieves will take the splendid sword of the young hero."

"God be with you, little mother!" Ayub grinned at the thought of vagabonds attempting to take Kirdy's scimitar, and folded his arms to gaze at the spectacle in the courtyard.

A SMALL black bear had been chained to a stake and a pack of dogs set on him. Behind the dogs, men lounged against the wagons, urging on the pack with cries, while the bear, growling deep in its throat, swayed from side to side, its muzzle foam-flecked and bloody. As the Cossacks watched, some soldiers appeared, and one of them fired two pistols into the animal's head, while the others beat off the frantic dogs with cudgels and spear butts. Then they shouted for servants to skin the bear, and for the tavern people to start a fire going under the pot.

"These be strange folk," observed Kirdy in his slow fashion when they had left the scene of the bear baiting. "For they will eat what the dogs have touched."

"When you are made welcome among the Zaporoghian Cossacks," growled Ayub, "you, too, will have a bear to deal with, little warrior. Every *oùchar*—every unfledged manling must do that. You will be given a wooden sword in place of that skull smasher of yours. If you ask, the bear's claws will be clipped, but only the common sort ask that. You grasp your wooden sabre and say a prayer and the bear is let loose. Then—cut, slash! You try to whack him where the spine joins the base of the skull; if you do, that lays him down; if you don't, your brother warriors pull you out feet first and no maiden will ever eat sunflower seeds with you again."

Kirdy's dark face was impassive. He had been told by his grandfather of the Cossack war camps, where the warriors gave one another nicknames and revelled day and night. There the chosen heroes of the border were to be found—men who had put aside their past and lived only for war, who thought no more of cattle or wives but only of that last inevitable embrace to be bestowed by Mother Death.

Eagerly he waited the moment when he, who had been born in the steppes of Asia, could ride into the camp of his grandfather's people and try out his strength with the young warriors.

Khlit, too, looked forward to that moment with all the keen anxiety of the aged. Too old himself to draw his sword with the Cossack brotherhood or to go on the raids across the border, he longed to see Kirdy taken in by his former companions. He hoped that the boy who had in his veins the blood of Mongol khans of the line of the great Tchingis, would win honor. But of this he said nothing to Ayub who was a brave and seasoned warrior in spite of his boasting. Only by deeds, not words, could a youth like Kirdy win a nickname and honor among Cossacks.

They had come north from the frontier at Ayub's request to greet the *ataman* Demid and his five hundred warriors of the Don. Khlit in his wisdom approved of this, because at Moscow was the Tsar, and the Cossacks there might well be sent on an honorable mission, to make war on the Turks or Tatars across the border. And no Cossack youth would be received as an equal by the elder warriors until he had raided across the border.

"The —— take this city!" grumbled Ayub. "It has not one street but a hundred. Who ever saw such a city?"

Kirdy and Khlit, who had beheld the palaces of Herat and the great temples and crowded avenues of Delhi, nodded courteously and the three wandered on, going into more than one tavern and stopping before the doors of more than one church, but holding to their course until they came to a high wall of white stone with a serried

summit. This they followed until a gate appeared and they learned that they were entering the Kremyl or citadel.

Here they found no more taverns—only the barred gates of the court enclosures where soldiers of the Imperial Guard were posted and through which equerries, dragomans and foreign officers came and went. When they asked for the Don Cossacks they were directed to an open space under the white wall.

"Only think," Ayub grinned, "Demid the Falcon is perched among the grandees."

He swaggered off, arm in arm with his companions, taking the center of the passageways and turning the corners wide. At the top of his voice he chanted his favorite catch:

"Ho, my Gretchen-girl!
Hi, my lass!
Ho, my pretty pearl—
Hi—"

He stopped abruptly, and Khlit grunted. They had rounded a turn and come full on the quarters of the Don Cossacks. In the trodden mud of an open square stakes had been driven to form three sides of an enclosure against the wall. The stakes were higher than a man could reach and a bare six inches apart. And the palisade lacked a roof, so that the sun beat down on the throng of men who were penned within it. Sentries bearing arquebuses and lighted matches paced outside the palisade.

CHAPTER II

DEMID'S MEN

IT WAS true that the Tsar Ivan had taken the Don Cossacks under his protection and they had served well in his wars, though they admitted no chieftain except their own *ataman*. After Ivan's death the wars ceased and caravans began to appear, making their way beside the river Don to Astrakhan and the markets of Persia and Asia Minor. For a time the *Donskoi* tribesmen agreed to act as guards to these merchant caravans, but before long the unruly spirits of the Cossacks flared up and fighting broke out between them and the Muscovites. An army was sent to discipline them and they made a stand against it, cutting up the Muscovites and driving them back.

Under Boris Godunov a second expedition of picked infantry was sent to the Don and the *ataman* and five hundred prisoners were brought to Moscow.

This was the story Demid told Ayub, hanging his head for shame that he, an *ataman* of the Siech, should be penned with his men like captured beasts for the multitude to stare at.

"Not yours is the dishonor, Demid, *kunak moi!*" roared the big Zaporoghian. "The dishonor is theirs who quartered you in mud where dogs would not lie down!"

Demid smiled quizzically, his gray eyes lighting up. He was slighter than the three wanderers, with a down curved nose that had given him the nickname of "The Falcon." One sleeve of his coat hung empty and his injured arm was strapped to his chest by his belt.

"Nay, do not bellow like a buffalo. In a fortnight my men are to be tortured and beheaded. I am to be hung up with the *kuren atamans* on hooks from a stake. The stake will be set on a raft and we will float on the river like condemned pirates."

"By whose command!"

"By order of Boris Godunov."

Ayub beat his fists against his temples and ground his teeth, cursing his drunkenness and his long wandering in the steppe that had kept him in ignorance of the fate of his dearest friend. Kirdy stared at the *Donskoi* with puzzled eagerness. They were slender men for the most part, taller than the Muscovites and more restless. Many of them were wounded and some lay on cots improvised out of coats slung between logs. Others had their heads bandaged, and the shirts that had been used for bandages were black with hardened blood and dirt.

But traces of plunder—whether from the caravans or across the border—were visible in their long green sashes, and the gold brocade and sable trimming of their coats. Two were casting dice between the outstretched legs of one of the sleepers on the cots, and another with a burned stick was tracing on the white wall the words "*Tà Nitchògo*"—"It does not matter!"

Ayub sighed heavily and bethought him of Khlit.

"Here is the Wolf, who was *koshevoi ataman* before our mothers suckled us, Demid. I came upon him in the steppe,

and as God sees me, we rode hither in a dark hour."

The wounded *ataman* flushed as he gripped Khlit's hand in the aperture between the stakes.

"Health to you, brother," he said. "You can do no good here—though the minstrels have told many a time of the deeds you performed in other days. The Tsar has ordered our death."

"It is not an honorable death," growled Khlit.

"We were born in pain," acknowledged Demid, "and we can face it again. But go hence with Ayub. You are not of the *Donskoi*, but you are a Cossack."

Khlit's gray eyes peered at Ayub under his thatch of heavy brows, and the Zaporoghian shook his head.

"That is impossible. You and the boy ride hence. I"—he thought for a moment with bent head—"I shall ask justice of the Tsar."

"But the Tsar has already given justice," said Demid quickly.

Ayub began to breathe heavily.

"Then—the foul fiend take me—let us draw our blades and cut down the sentries."

The Don Cossacks who had pressed close to greet the wanderers and to listen, shook their heads, although their eyes glistened.

"No such thing, Ayub— Would you then cut down these stakes? Will you give us wings to fly over the three walls? Will you sing, so that the Muscovite soldiery will be enraptured and forget that you are a Cossack?"

"May the dogs bite you!" growled Ayub. "I've got out of worse places than this!"

"The forehead to you, Ayub!" laughed a warrior with only one good eye. "Then you must have changed into a snake and crawled out. Go and tell the Tsar one of your tales and he won't know what is true and what is false any longer. Only bring us brandy, if you can. And look out or the sentries will have you on this side of the stakes."

In fact the arquebusiers were beginning to draw closer and an officer, aroused by the laughter, was approaching. The Don warrior who was writing on the wall, finished his *Tà Nitchògo*, and turned to say farewell.

"It doesn't matter, sir brothers. Go with God."

"With God!" echoed deep voices as the three wanderers made off before the Muscovites. They went out of the Kremyl gate and by mutual consent sought out the scanty plane trees of a monastery garden, deserted at this hour of sunset when the bells of Moscow echoed from the lofty towers. As the tavern woman had prophesied, the anthem of the bells was solemn, but they were not as grievous as the groans of the big Zaporoghian.

Demid, he said, was the falcon of the Cossacks; the young *ataman* had performed many a deed of glory, and once he had led a raid across the Black Sea and had entered the castle of Aleppo, bearing away with him the treasure of a sultan. Suddenly he smote the jingling purse at his hip and whispered to Khlit:

"We have some gold left, Old Wolf. Let us go with it to the castle of the Tsar and make presents to the guards and the nobles. The Muscovites love gold as swine love corn—thus we may gain audience with Boris Godunov."

Hearing this, Kirdy glanced expectantly at his grandfather, who was no stranger to stratagems. The young warrior had nothing to propose himself. On the steppe, within sight of a foeman, his blood would quicken and his thoughts would be keen; but he did not see how sword strokes would avail to release the Don Cossacks, and he listened quietly to the discussion of the two older men.

For a moment Khlit occupied himself with his pipe and his tobacco pouch.

"The Muscovites are not our people, Ayub," he said bluntly.

"But the gold—"

"Is not enough. I have watched men come to the seat of kings, and those who came to ask favors were given little, while others who came to offer service were made welcome."

"Devil take it! How could we serve this Tsar?" Ayub had room in his mind for no more than one idea at a time.

"With kings, favor is to be gained by pleasing them," went on the old Cossack. "Torture is a hard death and this must be a stern king."

"What would you do?"

"Nay, what can be done? Demid and his men are doomed, and yet—" Khlit glanced at the white wall of the citadel, gleaming softly red with the failing light. "Never have I seen an *ataman* perish in such fashion. Divide the ducats, take half to

the palace if you will but give me the other half for brandy."

FOR the next few hours Kirdy was left to himself and he squatted under the tree as motionless as one of the painted figures on the door of the monastery behind him. Hidden by the deep shadows of the garden, he watched the Muscovites change guard at the Kremyl gate. He saw the nobles come out, escorted by link-bearers and gaunt wolfhounds. He listened to the long-robed priests who, in their high hats, chatted and laughed very much as ordinary mortals after dinner. Kirdy had had no dinner, but his patience was limitless, and he felt more at ease out under the stars than penned within the walls of a building, for the Mongol strain in him made him shun houses.

It was long after evening prayer when Ayub appeared, snorting and muttering.

He had bribed a sentry at one of the entrances to let him inside the palace, only to find that he was in the kitchen. And he had handed over the rest of his gold to a man in a splendid uniform who proved to be a *heyduke*, or officer's servant, and had taunted him saying that all Cossacks were outlaws and masterless men and if one were found in the palace with a sword he would be chained to a stake; but in Ayub's case they would let him go free. And then the servants of the *boyar* had hustled him out.

"Where the —— is Khlit?" Ayub growled.

"After the candles were lighted he came back from the bazaar. He had a jug and a new white shirt with embroidery on it, and a fine sash as long as a lariat. He left his sheepskin here and took with him only the jug and a new satin cloak."

"Then the old dog has been drinking! He's been licking the jug as well as carrying it."

"His beard was combed," Kirdy reported, "and smelled of musk."

"He must be drunk. Some woman has been playing tricks with him. Well, no matter. The devil himself couldn't get into that palace through the chimney."

Thoroughly disgruntled, Ayub wrapped himself up in Khlit's *svitka* and sprawled out to sleep, while Kirdy kept his silent watch, poking the big Zaporoghian when men passed near enough to hear the warrior's vibrating snores.

CHAPTER III

THE CITY OF THE GOLDEN SANDS

WHEN the last guests had left the banquet hall of the Terem, Kholop, the dwarf, made the rounds of the tables, emptying down his capacious throat the wine and mead that still remained in some of the goblets. More than once he stumbled over the form of a *boyar* who had rolled under the table, and then he bent down and grimaced until the servitors who lingered to watch him roared with laughter.

One, who had been on duty at the outer door, approached the dwarf and bowed gravely.

"Long life to you, Prince Kholop. 'Tis a pity your serene Mightiness must drink your own health. So, here is long life to you."

The palace attendant picked up a slender silver cup and tossed it off with a quirk of his lips, while the dwarf blinked at him.

"Nay, here is a riddle, O most wise Prince Kholop. A *batyushka*—a grandfather has been hanging around the door asking which of the story tellers and buffoons is closest to the heart of the Tsar."

"I am!" replied Kholop instantly, straightening his white bearskin kaftan on his hunched shoulders, and spreading his stubby legs wide. "I am the favorite of Uncle Boris, and that is no riddle at all, but a fool's question."

The servant wiped his lips, glanced around and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Nay, your Uncle Boris seldom crosses your palm with silver. But the grandfather will give you a gold ducat if you will let him look at you."

He did not add that he himself had been promised a full jug of brandy for his trouble. The dwarf followed him willingly enough and gazed expectantly at the tall man with the white beard who carried a staff as if more inclined to use it on other peoples' shoulders than to lean on it himself.

"Now you've looked at me, grandfather, give me the ducat."

Khlit surveyed the favorite of the Tsar grimly and fumbled in his girdle.

"You can have another, cousin, if you take me to your master."

Kholop put his shaggy head on one side shrewdly, and wrestled with temptation.

"You look like a minstrel, *batyushka*," he said in his shrill voice, "but you are not blind. Let me see the coin."

"Nay, I am no blind minstrel," Khlit muttered, "yet I have a tale to tell to your master."

When the dwarf had feasted his eyes on the ducat he made a sign for the Cossack to follow him and went off into the darkness, hugging his bearskin about him. At a postern gate he paused to listen until he was satisfied that no guards were within; then he darted into a narrow stairway that led, Khlit thought, into a tower because it wound upward without the trace of a window.

Evidently Kholop was familiar with the way. He thrust open a narrow door boldly and Khlit followed him into a hall occupied only by a sentry who stood, halberd in hand, before a curtained door. Into this the dwarf disappeared, presently returning with a gentleman-in-waiting who frowned at the old Cossack and fingered his beard irresolutely.

"So you are a grandfather from the border? My master has a ready ear for vagabond's tales, but if you are a magician he will have you set alive on a stake."

"Nay," growled Khlit, "I am no magician."

"It will go ill with you if you are," insisted the noble, searching him for hidden weapons or evidence of the sorcerer's art. "Mind now, if you try to set a spell on his majesty or to lift footprints, the dogs will have you."

He raised the curtain and Khlit and Kholop passed into a low chamber where, in spite of the heat, a fire smoldered. The walls were hung with silk tapestries and in one corner Khlit saw upon an ebony stand an ivory elephant with gleaming emerald eyes and a *howdah* of wrought gold with its silver canopy. In an armchair before the fire sat a man whose white skin shone from the mesh of a black beard, whose fine eyes wandered from the flames to the glimmering elephant and to the old Cossack who bowed deeply.

From behind the armchair advanced a *ambardnik*—a youthful *boyar* who wore jauntily his purple and gold *kaftan*, his brocade tunic with its gold eagle on the breast, and his purple kid boots with their gold spurs. One hand rested on the long butt of the pistol in his belt as he took station behind the Cossack.

"O great prince," Khlit voiced the customary phrase, "grant me to speak and live."

Boris Godunov made no response, except a gesture of a plump hand.

"Be your tale of Turagin the Dragon or the falcon ship *Patink* speak, minstrel," whispered the boy behind him.

Khlit cleared his throat and leaned on his staff. Many a time had he heard the tales of the minstrels, but he did not know how to repeat them. He was a man of few words and the years had not made him talkative. But he knew what was in his mind.

"*Zdorovènky boùly, O Kha Khan!* Health to you, White Lord," his deep voice rumbled. "This is truth! Beyond your kingdom, if you ride with the rising sun on your left hand, is the Blue Sea. Beyond that is the desert of gray salt. If you know where to seek you will find the round stones and sand of a river. No water flows in the river in these days, but once it was otherwise, for a city stands by these golden sands. The name of the city is Urgench, and it is the stronghold of the Turkoman khans."

The round head of Boris turned slowly toward the Cossack and Kholop began to look frightened, because Khlit was not speaking in the manner of the minstrels and the dwarf fancied that his own reward would be not a ducat but a whipping.

"It is ten days' ride from the reeds of the Blue Sea to the city of Urgench and the lord of the city is Arap Muhammad Khan, a brave man and an experienced warrior. In his *terem*—his dwelling—the khan has gathered spoil from Khiva and Bokhara. I have seen in this place woven silks from Cathay, coral from the Indian Sea, and carved ivory finer than that elephant."

Khlit pointed his stick at the corner and folded his arms meditatively.

"Dog of the devil, but the treasure of the Turkoman khans is a good one. The best of it is jewels, rubies from Badakshan, and circlets of shining sapphires and a pair of emeralds as large as a man's eyes. These last I have not seen, but the Tatar Ishan who told me of them was not a liar."

The glance of Boris Godunov rested fleetingly on the green eyes of the elephant and he lifted his hand impatiently.

"What tale is this? Of Urgench have I heard, yet no *batyushka* ever wandered within sight of the Blue Sea. What man are you?"

"One who has seen Urgench and the riders of the Turkoman khans, O prince."

"What is that to me?"

"The spoil of Urgench is worth having."

Boris Godunov had an alert mind; he was ambitious, covetous perhaps, but wise beyond others in Muscovy. A hard man, who had held the reins of power during the bloody reign of Ivan the Terrible, he was clever enough to accomplish by scheming what another would have gained by sword strokes. And he had strange fancies.

"Kholop," he said gravely, "would you ride beyond the border to the Blue Sea and bring me the spoils of Urgench?"

"Sire," the dwarf responded boldly, "White or Black, I fear me no sea, but this thing that lies in the desert I do fear. If a sea is in the desert some devil put it there for no good. Aye, and dried up the river into the bargain."

"I see you are a good councilor but a poor soldier, Kholop."

"Nay, Uncle Boris, I am a good soldier because I am better than the illustrious lord-colonel that went against the Don Cossacks."

"How so, *bogatyr?*"

"Because while I am a head shorter than other folk, he was shortened by a head."

While he had been teasing the dwarf the Tsar had been thinking. It was a way of his to turn suddenly upon men, and so he spoke to Khlit.

"My regiments have never been able to come within sight of the Blue Sea."

Unperturbed, the old Cossack nodded agreement.

"*O Kha Khan*, would you send a dog to rob an eagle's nest?"

"Speak, then. I give you leave. What is your thought?"

Khlit's answer came swiftly, and they who heard it knew that he was indeed no minstrel but one who had had men to his command.

"Send the Don Cossacks to sack Urgench. They are steppe wolves; they can find the way. If you put them to death in Moscow, Sire, you will gain naught save the enmity of their fellows on the Don. Bloodshed and fire will repay their deaths."

"I would do well indeed, *batyushka*, to set loose five hundred devils along the border." Boris permitted himself a smile.

"They are Cossacks, Sire. If they give pledge to fare to Urgench they will keep their word. Your regiments are posted in their home villages, and their families are surety for their faith."

For a while Boris considered, and not even the *kambardnik* who was his bodyguard could read his thoughts in his face.

"I am of two minds, concerning you, Cossack—for such I take you to be. What was your purpose in coming to me?"

"*O Kha Khan*, it is an evil fate to be hanged to hooks. The road to Urgench is a hard one and it may be that the *Donskoi* will not live to ride back upon it. But death in the saddle is honorable. Once in the time of the Tsar Ivan I was *koshevoi ataman* of all the Cossacks."

Chin on fist, Boris studied the old warrior, and spoke suddenly.

"And if I order you to lead the Don men to Urgench?"

Khlit stroked his mustache and his bleak eyes softened.

"Hide of the evil one, that is good hearing!"

"At least," Boris laughed, "you are no *okolnitchi*—no courtier. I begin to suspect that you are a magician." Swiftly his mood changed to the dark humor that so often fell upon him. "Take this wayfarer to the guards. Keep him under key—" he motioned impatiently to the nobleman who was in attendance and Khlit was led away.

Left alone with the dwarf, Boris was silent. From the rank of a councilor he had risen to the eagle throne, by the murder of Ivan's son. He had planned well and yet he was not satisfied. Plague and famine had taken toll of the land; the border was rising against him; the far-lying empire of Ivan was dwindling. The Tatars from whom Ivan had taken Kazan and Astrakhan were in arms again.

Under the rule of the warrior, Ivan, a band of Cossacks headed by an adventurer, Irmak, had won Siberia for the Tsar. What if the Don Cossacks brought him the treasure of Urgench?

Boris was a statesman rather than a soldier. If he could restore peace on the Don and strike a blow at the Turkoman khans it would be something gained. And the treasure?

He frowned at the fire reflectively. The southern border of the empire was the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus; to the east lay the caravan route to Cathay, passing through a desert that was without life—cosmographers at his court said that here was a hollow in the earth's surface, where the land lay below the level of the sea.

In the center of this desert traders had seen the Blue Sea* a month's ride from the frontier of Muscovy. And more often of late the caravan bearing his goods had been plundered near the Blue Sea by the Turkomans. Urgench, the city of the khans, was the stronghold of the raiders, and men said that gold was plentiful there as silver in Moscow.

"Kholop," said the man in the chair, "bid the Tatar slaves come to me, armed. Send for the leader of the Don warriors."

ON THE following day from the windows of the Terem the Tsar Boris Godunov watched his officers cut down one of the stakes in the pen of the Don Cossacks. The captives poured through the opening shouting, leaping and hugging one another. Bandages were torn off, and they rioted, mad with joy until the guards led them away to be fed and quartered in the barracks of the *strelsui*.

Then command was given to ring the bells of the city, for Boris Godunov went forth with his high-born *boyars* and the councilors, to the throne in the Palace of Facets, where he was accustomed to receive envoys from other peoples. Seated upon the daïs, his hands resting on the lion heads that formed the arms of the throne of Solomon, with two young *kambardniks* on his right and left he listened while a minister read aloud an agreement written upon parchment.

"By command of the most serene and most potent Tsar, and Great Prince Boris Godunov, by the grace of God emperor of the whole, great, White and Little Russia, great Duke of Vladimir, Monarch of Moscow and Kief, Tsar of Kazan, Tsar of Astrakhan, Tsar of Siberia, lord of many lands, commander of peoples extending East, West and North, the inheritance of his ancestors.

"Before all, with good intent and friendly desire and in accordance to our holy Christian faith—freedom of life and limb is granted to certain masterless men, the Cossacks of the Don upon condition that they fare forth to the city of Urgench and there make war upon the Moslems and do not return to their own villages except by way of Kamushink upon the border, where they will deliver all spoils and gains from their adventure into the hands of the governor, to be conveyed to us. Written in our dominion in our palace and city of Moscow in the fourth year of our governance."

The eyes of the *boyars* rested upon Khlit and Demid, the chief of the Don Cossacks who stood before the daïs between two guards armed with silver halberds.

"You have heard the command of his most Christian and most compassionate majesty," pursued the councilor who had read the *ukase*, "and now do you give oath that you will fulfil your part of the agreement—yourselves and your men."

"We swear it," said both Cossacks promptly, "by our faith."

The councilor seemed startled by this brief pledge, but before he could speak Demid advanced a pace and bowed to the girdle. His eyes were shining and he held his head high when he spoke.

"Great Prince, we have a long road before us and who knows what is at the end? Give us then good weapons and horses."

"What will you need?" asked Boris.

"A thousand horses—fifty strong carts for baggage, grain and powder. Three hundred lances and two hundred firelocks, and sabers for all."

The Tsar spoke with one of his officers, and nodded.

"No more than five hundred horses can be spared, Cossack. These, with the lances will be given to your regiment at Moscow. The other arms and the carts you will find at Kamushink, the frontier post on the Volga by which you are to leave and enter the empire."

"I thank you, and my men will also thank you."

"On your way to Kamushink two regiments of the *boyars'* cavalry will accompany your Cossacks."

Demid flushed and bowed again, silently.

"Consider this, warrior," went on Boris sternly. "My forces on the border are close to the villages of your people; if you play me false, or if you return to the empire without the spoils of Urgench your people will be the ones to suffer. You have lifted your hand against our rule, and our forbearance allows you to seek the ransom of your lives."

The young Cossack chief started as if his back had been stung by a whip, and

*The Sea of Aral.

this amused the *boyars* who were watching him curiously.

His life had begun on the prairies where there was no law except the old customs of the Cossacks, and no peace except that which could be won by the sword from the Tatar and the Turkish hordes. He did not understand the Muscovites, who built cities and sent caravans of merchants into the East, but he had seen their power. Their great churches filled him with awe and the sight of nobles buying and selling serfs aroused his contempt. His people—the rovers who lived on the fish in the rivers and the game in the forests—were being pressed back farther and farther into the steppe, and roads were being built over the virgin wilderness, roads that led to Moscow. All this Demid did not understand.

"Great Prince," he said after a moment's thought. "If we win gold and silks and jewels we will bring them to you as we have sworn, because of such things Cossacks have no need. We can take them from our enemies. Our word is not smoke. If we do not stand before you in this place again it will be because our bodies lie in the desert."

"Well said, brother," muttered Khlit with satisfaction.

"Not long ago," went on the Tsar coldly, "a masterless man, Irmak with his Cossacks who were brigands, fared into Siberia and took it from the Tatars. Their wrongs were pardoned them and they were honored by the Tsar Ivan."

Demid bent his head in assent. The blind minstrels had sung of Irmak who had left his body in a river in the East; but Ivan had been a warrior who led armies across the border, while Boris was intent on trade and intrigue.

"We will do what we may, O Tsar. We bow the head to you for your mercy, and ask leave to depart."

A shadow of suspicion touched the broad face of Boris, but it vanished in a ready smile and he rose from the throne. No sooner had he left the hall than he called Kholop to him and retired to his rooms unattended except by the dwarf and an old Tatar who had been present at the audience.

Throwing himself in his chair the Tsar glanced at the native anxiously and spoke under his breath.

"O Shamaki, you who have skill to read what is to be—you who have learned the secrets of Nasr-ed-din and the wise Ptolemy, can you tell me whether I shall gain riches in this venture?"

Kholop, who had a healthy dread of the Tatar conjurer, squatted close to his master and watched while Shamaki, who seemed not at all surprized at the request of his master, drew from his girdle a wooden bowl and a sack. From the sack he poured a small torrent of millet seeds of different colors, and turned the bowl slowly in his withered hands.

Then, kneeling on the floor he began to rock on his haunches, rumbling in his throat more like an animal than a man. To Boris and the dwarf it seemed as if the millet seeds were still whirling in the bowl, although the Tatar's fingers no longer moved.

Presently the magician bent his head to stare into the bowl and Boris moved restlessly in his chair, for in all his undertakings he never failed to consult this conjurer.

"*Ai, Kha Khan,*" croaked the old man, "I see bloodshed—the brown sands turn red. I see the black vultures dropping from the sky."

"What more?"

"I see the gray bones of death, and the white pearls of wealth.

"And what gain to me?"

The Tatar closed his eyes and shook his head slowly.

"Only God knows, O *Kha Khan.*"

When others had come into the room, Kholop sidled up to Shamaki and grimaced.

"Fool—you could have had a silver coin if you had foretold gain to my master. If the men die how can they bring wealth?"

The bleared eyes of the Tatar turned on the dwarf and his thin lips parted, soundlessly. And Kholop was frightened by this silence of the old native who thought less of a silver rix-dollar than he did of millet seeds, red, white and black, running around in a bowl.

CHAPTER IV

The road through the forest is marked by verst posts; the trail over the prairies is known by the hay-ricks; but only the bones of the dead mark the path into the desert.

A MONTH after the Tsar Boris gave out his *ukase* concerning the freedom of the five hundred Don Cossacks, the expedition arrived at the frontier post of Kamushink,

having covered six hundred miles over a newly made highway through the forest belt and the steppe pastures to the southeast of Moscow. When Captain Van Elfsberg, the Swedish officer in command of the escort, saw the broad gray expanse of the Volga river between the mountain peaks that towered over the town he sighed with relief.

An excellent soldier, Van Elfsberg, tall, with yellow mustaches that curled up to his eyes—a fine figure in hip boots, polished breastplate, fringed sash and broad lace collar. He served the Muscovite Tsar for pay, which he seldom received, and he obeyed orders, of which there was no lack.

He had left the plague-ridden city of Moscow behind him with pleasure, but now the vast wilderness into which he had penetrated rather depressed him. For two hundred versts they had not seen a town, nor a tavern. Before him the rolling grassland had stretched endlessly, with its herds of wild horses, its diminutive marmots and its clamorous flights of geese and cranes.

The road had been no more than vague tracks at the river fords and the ashes of former camp fires. Van Elfsberg found that, near the end of his journey to the frontier, instead of escorting the Cossacks, he was being guided by them.

They had been given poor horses in Moscow because the Tsar's officers had been unwilling to spare good ones—horses, in any event, were scarce in this time of famine. They had had no saddles at all; but by degrees, once they moved out on the steppe, the Cossacks became better mounted. Where they got the sturdy ponies that they now rode the Swedish captain did not know.

He suspected that marauding parties left the lines of the *Donskoi* after nightfall; several times he had seen Cossacks riding after the herds of wild horses with lariats made out of horsehair and cords begged from the wagon train.

His prisoners—according to his orders they were to be treated as such—had ridden from Moscow a regiment of skeletons. Now the flesh on their bones had grown firm, although the rations issued to them were scanty. They made themselves bows, and shot down wild duck. After they brought to his tent one evening the choice loin of a stag, Van Elfsberg permitted the Cossacks to go on hunting forays during the day's march.

The plain abounded in game and the Cossacks ran down wild boar with their lances, and cut into the great herds of buffalo and roe deer.

Punctiliously every day at dawn Van Elfsberg had them mustered in squadrons and his officers called the roll. He found to his amazement that he now had more Cossacks than he had started with. Where the others came from he did not know, except that sentries reported riders appearing at night from out of the steppe, as wolves might slip from a forest. In fact he heard wolf-like howling beyond his lines in the darkness, and this howling was answered by the cries of panthers and the baying of dogs in the direction of the Cossacks' tents, where there were neither dogs nor panthers.

Van Elfsberg saw that this wilderness, this barren sea of grass, supported human life, and he believed that the villages of the Don Cossacks could not be many days' ride distant. The tidings of his march had gone before him. Although he had good reason to be pleased with the successful end of his march, he wondered if the invisible friends of the *Donskoi* were not preparing to rescue the captives at Kamushink—until he reflected that men who would be free in another day would not bring on a conflict with his men in order to leave him now.

The rising spirits of the Cossacks he attributed to this nearness to liberty, and he fully expected that once they were across the Volga with wagons and supplies and arms they would circle back somewhere and think no longer of their oath given to the Tsar.

But at Kamushink trouble awaited him.

"Excellency," a sergeant of chasseurs—his own troop of armored cavalry—reported to Van Elfsberg one evening at his tent entrance, "the Cossack savages have broken bonds."

"How?" demanded the veteran captain.

"They are smashing the doors of the merchants' storehouses and rolling out barrels of brandy and wine. They are taking logs to build fires."

"Are they armed?"

That noon the distribution of the stores—barley, and wheat and powder and lead for bullets—had been made to the chief of the Cossacks. The two hundred firelocks had been counted over, with flints and slings for the powder charges; the wagons had been inspected and greased and oxen picked out to haul them. Five hundred sabers had

been accepted and the Cossacks had set to work at once loading the wagons and sharpening the sabers. The tasks had been finished at sunset.

"Their lances are stacked, Excellency, but they wear the sabers. The *rutchùitzi*—the flintlocks—are in the wagons."

"The ——!" muttered Van Elfsberg. "They have waited until they are fitted out and now—send their captain to me, at once. Wait! Offer him my compliments and beg that he will speak with me at this tent."

"At command!"

The sergeant of the chasseurs saluted, mounted and galloped away. The quiet of the night was broken by shouting and hurrying footsteps, by the neighing of horses and the crackling of flames. Van Elfsberg sent his orderly to bid a squadron commander muster his men in readiness to mount, and to double the guards stationed at the cannon in the watch-towers of the town.

"The Cossacks act like men who expect a rescue," he muttered. "Well, they'll swallow bullets, that's all—ah, *Ataman!*"

"Health to you, *Sotnik!*"

Demid cantered up on a horse that the Swede had never seen before. His arm had healed, and the blood coursed again in his cheeks. Van Elfsberg noticed that the scimitar at his belt was not the saber issued from the Muscovite stores. And the young Cossack did not dismount, which displeased the Swede who was a stickler for discipline.

"Your men are rioting, *Ataman,*" he said curtly, "and by the devil, I think you have been drinking."

"Aye, Captain," smiled Demid, "the warriors are playing a bit. There is no harm, in this hour."

An outburst of shots from the central square, near the log houses of the merchants, interrupted them. Van Elfsberg's yellow mustache bristled and his long chin with its pointed beard thrust out as he looked down the street between the barracks. The light from the fires was growing stronger, and he saw the Don warriors in their long coats rolling out barrels.

"Order them to cease! Send them out of the gate—bind the leaders and stake them out."

Demid shook his head good-naturedly.

"In this hour, Captain, I have no authority."

"They are your men!"

Glancing at the chasseurs who were forming in front of the Muscovite barracks under a *boyar* ensign, Demid spoke more seriously.

"Keep your men out of ranks, Commander, unless you want blows. Come with me, if you wish to see what is going on."

Suspicion grew in the officer, as he noticed newcomers in the increasing throng about the fires, and heard the thudding hoofs of a multitude of ponies outside the low mud wall of the town. Calling for his horse and orderly, he climbed into the saddle and looked toward the camp of the *Donskoi* which was between the town and the river. The long dark line of wagons was deserted, while Cossacks, visible in the glow of the watch fires, were crowding to look at groups of ponies—shaggy little animals from which boys and girls and old men were dismounting.

EVIDENTLY, if reinforcements were reaching the Don warriors, the newcomers were a poor sort. Van Elfsberg decided to look into the matter before making a show of force to stop the rioting. Taking only his orderly—he did not lack courage—and bidding the ensign await his command, he trotted beside Demid to the square and began to swear under his breath.

The stalls of the merchants had been torn up for fuel and the Muscovites had barred themselves in their log houses. Kegs and whole barrels of brandy and mead had been broached, and the warriors were swarming around these like bees, dipping in with their caps or cupped hands. In and out between the throngs bareheaded riders were passing at full gallop, avoiding by what Van Elfsberg considered a miracle running the drinkers down, and letting off muskets and pistols.

First one youth then another leaped in the air and began the wild *kosaka* dance, to the strumming of the *balalaikas* and the shouts of those who watched eagerly.

Among the dancers appeared Cossack girls in bright kerchiefs and loose smocks. Barefoot, they tossed back their long locks and advanced and retreated before the warriors, while the mutter of voices deepened into a roar.

"*Ou-ha! Ou-ha!*"

Too, among the revelers were to be seen more than a few green and white uniforms of Van Elfsberg's chasseurs and the somber

coats of the *strelsui*—the guards of the Cossacks.

Winding in and out, a procession formed behind burly Ayub. The big Zaporoghian had been given a standard—such a standard as the Swedish officer had never beheld before. A pole as long as a lance supported a pair of horns from which hung white buffalo tails. Above the horns shone the head of a white falcon.

"The standard of the *Donskoi*, Captain," said Demid who had followed his glance. "Only listen!"

Ayub's great voice rang out above the tumult.

"Shall we sit idle?
Follow Death's dance!
Pick up your bridle,
Saddle and lance—
Brothers—advance!"

At once the fiddles and guitars struck up the melody, and from somewhere a drum rumbled. A hundred voices chimed in—not the dragging chorus of a mob singing but the splendid harmony of trained voices—and the clear soprano of the young girls floated above the diapason of the men.

"*Ma foi*," muttered Van Elfsberg, "that is well done."

The song quickened into a wild surge of melody and ended on a single high note that seemed to echo in the air like the after-tone of a bell.

"Though the dark Raider
Rob us of joy—
Death the invader
Come to destroy—
Nitchôgo—stoi!*"

"What is it—that song?" asked the officer.

"It is old," Demid hesitated. "It is called the march of the *Donskoi*."

"But where did all these people come from?" Van Elfsberg was trying to catch the eye of a lass in a white kerchief and cloth-of-silver cap who had left the circle of dancers and seemed to be searching for some one in the throng of warriors.

"From the villages along the Don," responded the Cossack curtly. "They brought my standard and baton—the Muscovites did not capture those. They brought the extra horses that we need. Look yonder, *Sotnik*."

Turning in the circle he swept his arm at the darkness through which the gray surface of the broad Volga gleamed. Kamushink, nestled between mountains, overlooked the rushes and the bare plain of the far bank.

"What is it?"

"The desert. Of those who venture into it not many come back. Before setting out on such a road it is the custom of the Cossacks to frolic. Today they will drink and dance and burn powder; at dawn they will set out. But until then I, the *ataman*, have no orders to give—"

Van Elfsberg did not think that these revelers would assemble under arms at daybreak, or for many hours after; but just then one of the warriors sighted the two officers and caught up a high pewter tankard, dipping it full in the nearest brandy keg. Staggering, he approached the Swede and leaned against his horse.

"Health to you, Puss-in-Boots. Here's something to wet your whistle."

The officer sniffed, but he sniffed above the brimming tankard and, though he frowned, he took a long swallow of the burning spirits.

"Don't wet your bib!" said the Cossack gravely. He had been staring at the enormous red collar that hung down over the Swede's chest. Van Elfsberg lifted his whip angrily, but the warrior, who had grasped the tankard again, was gulping down the brandy. He raised the jug higher and higher until the last drop had gone down his throat. Then he snorted, and turned slowly on his heels.

A rider cantered up from the gate and the drunken Cossack cast the heavy tankard at his head. The mounted warrior merely swerved his body and laughed, while his comrade after one or two attempts to walk back to the brandy barrel, stretched himself out on the ground heedless of horses and dancers alike.

Meanwhile the rider had reined his pony at a group of girls, drawing the beast back on its haunches so suddenly that gravel scattered over the bright dresses. Leaning on one stirrup, he caught one of the young women around the waist, and lifted her, laughing and struggling, to his saddle peak.

"*Na*," said Van Elfsberg. "Who will pay for all this?"

But Demid no longer gave him any attention; the *ataman* was going from group to group and the warriors roared greetings at him, calling him Falcon and Father and dog-brother.

Left to himself, Van Elfsberg looked after

*It does not matter.

the young Cossack who had carried off the girl. In the red glow from the fires the lad's eyes shone, and surely there were tears in the eyes of the maid, and yet she was laughing. One of her dark tresses, escaping from her cloth-of-silver cap, wound around his throat when a wind gust whipped her garments, as if she were holding him to her and did not want to let him go.

"Plague take it!" said the officer heartily, when the two had passed beyond the circle of light. He felt vaguely dissatisfied and restless as if he had intruded into a place where he was not wanted. Presently he decided the best thing to do would be to go to his own headquarters and wait for morning.

No sooner had he left the square than scores of his chasseurs appeared from the alleys where they had been in hiding and ran to the fires where they were soon drinking with the Cossacks.

KIRDY, all eyes and ears, wandered from circle to circle, listening to the singing and the stories of the *bandura* players, but he did not find Khlit for whom he was seeking, until he came to a fire over which a great pot was sizzling. The old Cossack was just chewing the last meat off a sheep's knuckle and when his grandson came up he gave the bone to a dog and wiped his hands on the dog's back.

"Eh, fledgling," he growled. "Have you eaten—have you drunk your fill of corn brandy? Good! Then listen to me."

He fumbled in his pouch and filled his short clay pipe, and Kirdy, pulling a burning stick from the fire, lighted it for him. Then he looked up at the stars.

"My eyes are not young. I can not see Aldebaran, but there's the Flying Geese. In another hour it will be cock crow and then the Don will seek their saddles."

Kirdy did not break his wonted silence. He knew that if his grandsire spoke so many words, there was a message to be given. Not advice—for Khlit never tried to give the young warrior counsel—but a warning or a question.

"*Oùchar*," he went on, in the Tatar in which they conversed, "we have been over the road to Urgench before, but we hid our swords and our faces. It is a long road and of those who set out not all will return. Some will be flayed alive; some will taste a stake. The Turkomans are wolves—wolves."

"*Yachim batyushka*—aye, Little Grandfather."

"You have seen the power of the Tsar of Muscovy. He can not protect his caravans from the Turkoman raiders. Eh, fledgling, we were drawing our reins toward the great war camp of the Cossacks. We can still go there; you will win a name and honor—I will drink with old friends again. We have been long on the trail."

"Aye, long."

"Or you can take service with the *khan bim-bashi*, the captain of the Muscovites. But in the desert you will have only a drawn belly and wounds to lick."

Under grizzled brows the hard eyes of the old Cossack peered at the fine brown eyes beside him.

"What is your choice lad?"

"I will go with the Don Cossacks." As his grandfather was silent Kirdy wondered if he could be displeased, and he added, pondering his words. "Surely honor is to be found where the way is hardest."

Khlit knocked out his pipe and, having noticed that others of the Don warriors who understood the Tatar language were following the talk, added sternly. "Only listen, noble sirs, to the young son of a dog! He has not made a raid yet, and he presumes to give counsel like an *ataman*."

One of the warriors nodded politely.

"Aye, Little Grandfather, he is young yet, and there is more milk than brandy on his lips but, by ——, we will make an *ataman* out of him."

Saying that, they were going to seek the standard, Khlit went off with the youth, but Kirdy thought that he was pleased by what had passed. Khlit did not speak again of turning back and Kirdy saw that the old man's blood was aroused by the revelry of the warriors, by the stories of the *bandura* players and the stir of the camp.

"We will find Demid," he grunted. "He's a falcon, they say—a sword slayer. He cut down a sultan with his own hand. Yet he thinks of everything—look at these horses he's brought up."

Swaggering among the knots of warriors, and scrutinizing those stretched out on the ground, Khlit led the way through the roisterers, harkening to the shrill cry of the fiddles. He paused by two big men who were pounding and tearing at each other,

rolling over in clouds of dust and grunting.

When the stoutest of the two pinned the other between his knees they saw the victor was Ayub. Hands clenched in his adversary's beard he was beating the unfortunate's head against the hard clay and swearing heartily. To his surprize, Kirdy recognized the *starosta* who had made game of them at the gate of Moscow.

The red facings were torn off the black coat of the Muscovite and blood trickled from his nose. Although several of his own men were standing near, no one offered to go to his assistance and Kirdy expected to hear his skull crack when Ayub paused to draw breath.

"May the dogs bite you! The hangman will light your way because no one else will want to be seen with you. You are a hero when it comes to catching flies on a wall. At your own gate you bay like a dog, but on the trail I didn't hear you at all. You'll be a man of deeds if you can get your wife to listen to you, but not otherwise."

"You called us 'devils in stinking sheepskins' *starosta*," grinned another Cossack. "All the same, you lap up our brandy."

"It's not yours, you thieving dogs," shouted the Muscovite.

"Call out the militia!"* gibed a thin warrior who wore a Turkish yataghan stuck through his sash. "Time to milk the cows."

"The forehead to you, *starosta!*" grinned one whose nose had been broken by a sword cut. "That's the way of it—if anything's stolen, the Cossacks are the thieves! But if there's a war the Cossacks are put in the van."

"I spit on you!" retorted the angered officer.

"You'll never spit on anything but your stomach," remarked Ayub. "By ——, you'll sit in the sun here in Kamushink and make ox-eyes at the native women, but you won't stir a hand toward them for fear they might box your ears. Then when we come back from Urgench with the treasure for your master you'll take it and lock it up, and start marching back with it to Moscow —one, two! Left, right! I know you Muscovites!"

"The forehead to you, Ayub!" shouted the warrior with the scar across his brow. "You fight well with words."

He laughed, and as he had been drinking from his cap at the time, the brandy poured out of his nostrils.

Ayub had been preparing to batter the head of the Muscovite under-officer again, but at this remark he started up, snorting, his anger directed into a new channel.

"With words! Steel to you, Dog-Face!"

He whipped out his light saber, given him by the Muscovites—for he had hidden his own heavy broadsword in the wagons when the weapons were issued—and swung it over his head.

"To one death, to the other life!" howled the scarred Cossack, beside himself at sight of bare steel. He drew his own weapon and sprang at Ayub and no one interfered because to do so would have earned a slash from a saber and besides, this was the affair of the two antagonists. Unnoticed, the *starosta* of the Moscow militia rolled away from the fire and made his escape into the darkness.

THEN Kirdy realized for the first time Ayub's strength. The sabers whistled in the air, clashed together, and at the second cut the blade of the smaller Cossack sprang from the hilt. It whirred into the glowing embers of the fire, scattering sparks on all who stood near.

"Give him a saber, some one!" cried Ayub. "Impossible to cut down a brother without a blade in his hand."

Before any one could reply Khlit spoke. He had been looking around on all sides, paying no attention to the quarreling.

"Where is the standard? You had it in your fist, Ayub."

"The *buntchauk*? What standard? What in the fiend's name do we want with the standard when there is corn brandy yet in the casks?"

Meanwhile Kirdy, who had sighted the glimmer of the spreading horns near the gate, pointed it out to Khlit. Demid had it, in a circle of a half dozen Cossacks who were no longer drinking, and toward this group the old warrior strode. His grandson could not refrain from looking back at Ayub.

The warrior of the *yataghan* had made a song out of Ayub's haphazard words, and the revelers, forgetting all disputes, were chanting the chorus:

"One, two! Left, right!
We know you, Muscovite!"

*The *streisui* were known as militia.

They stamped on the hard earth with their silver heels at each beat, and drained their cups at the end. Other fires took it up and in a moment the whole square was vibrating to the "one-two."

The pulse throbbed in Kirdy's wrists and his heart hammered his ribs. He wanted to shout, at the shrill cry of the fiddles, to leap into the dance. He stared boldly at his new comrades, at these men who had not a thought except the wild carouse of the moment, who sang like angels, who toasted no woman but lifted their cups to Mother Death.

Kirdy held his head high and tried to swagger like Khlit, and wished he had silver heels to stamp strongly on the earth. All at once a single desire flooded every part of his being. To find his horse, to mount and ride! Over the endless steppe, across rivers. To seek out foemen and cut at them with bare steel.

Instead, without feeling his limbs move, he found himself at Khlit's side in the ring of silent warriors by the standard. He heard their voices as if from far off, and noticed that Demid's head was steaming, and that the *ataman* had torn open his shirt to breathe the better, for he had drunk more than Ayub himself. His eyes were glowing, his white teeth shone under his mustache and his splendidly molded countenance was dark.

"Sir brothers," he was saying, "listen to my advice. Khlit, the Wolf, is wise in counsel; his head has grown white by reason of many battles. He has struck more blows than any of us, and moreover he has been *koshevoi ataman** of all the Cossacks. And so I say to you, who are *kuren atamans*—take the Wolf for your leader on the journey to Urgench." He held out the ivory staff, the baton of the *ataman* to Khlit. "Take it, sir brother!"

"Your advice is good," cried a handsome warrior in a fine red damask coat—one who was called Makshim by the others.

Khlit took off his black sheepskin hat and bowed.

"I thank you, sir brothers, and you, Falcon. That's my first speech. Now harken to my second. I am oldest in years—that's a fact. But my eyes are not keen; I'm good only to sit at the fire and eat game that another man has killed. If you had any fault to find with Demid it would be different. He has raided Moslems many a time; he's a fine Cossack, your Falcon, your father. I say the baton is his."

At this the leader of the *Donskoi* bent his head in thought for a while.

"You have spoken well, *Koshevoi*," he responded. "Yet I have never carried the standard across the Volga, nor do I know the Turkoman khans. So I say to you, 'Give me counsel, and ride at my side.' I will keep the baton, and the sir brothers will rejoice when they hear that the Wolf is with them."

"Aye," added Makshim. "He freed us from the stakes of the Muscovites."

"That is true," acknowledged Demid frankly. "We would have been given to the torture before now. We all bend the forehead to him for that deed."

Tall Makshim, who was bold of tongue, was not satisfied.

"There is the *oùchar*, the fledgling grandson of Khlit. Surely he should be given a *kuren* to lead."

Hearing this Khlit frowned.

"Makshim has not spoken well. What does this puppy of mine know of Cossack warfare? He must scratch out his own bed."

Demid glanced at Kirdy appraisingly; they had talked together on the march and had hunted roe deer on the steppe. Now the chieftain looked at the youth with the eye of a leader, not a comrade—for the hour was at hand when Demid's word was to be law. He noticed that the boy's eyes were cast down respectfully, and that he blushed at the attention of the elder warriors. He noticed, too, Kirdy's well knit shoulders and powerful hands, his wide, firm lips and high cheek-bones, and the splendid sword girdled high against his chest, Moslem fashion.

"Kirdy has been over the trail to Urgench," he observed slowly—he never spoke in haste. "I will give him ten other youths and they can go before us as scouts."

Flushing with pleasure, the boy bent his head, and sought for the right words to make response.

"I am your servant, brothers, Cossacks," he said in Tatar that was his native speech. "Only give me orders, for I am unskilled in war."

Demid smiled.

"You, who have come hither from Cathay

**Koshevoi ataman*, commander in chief of the *kosh*—camp. *Ataman*, leader, or colonel. *Kuren ataman*, commander of a barracks, or captain.

—what path have you followed, save that of war?" he answered in the same tongue.

Then he glanced over his shoulder and held up his hand for silence. Out by the stables the first cocks were crowing, and upon the dark plain across the river there was a level streak of orange light.

"It is time!" he cried.

"Time!" echoed Khlit, stroking down his gray mustache.

"Are we agreed, my brothers?" went on Demid. "Then the council is at an end, and I will give the military command."

At these words he put his high *kalpak* on his head and thrust the baton into his girdle. Immediately the others doffed their hats and waited in attentive silence. During the imprisonment in Moscow and while they were under the orders of Van Elfsberg, and when the revelry was on, Demid had been no more than their nominal head—their advisor and friend.

Now that they were to march into Asia as a military unit, all authority rested in the *ataman*. From his commands there would be no appeal, unless circumstances should compel them to call another council. In his hand was life or death; the responsibility was his, and not even the outspoken Makshim would have presumed to question an order of the *ataman*.

"Goloto's *kuren* will yoke up the oxen," said Demid, "and assist the Tatar drivers. The two *kurens* with muskets will escort the wagons down to the river. Makshim, go in advance and see that the barges are ready with oars. The three squadrons of lancers will follow. Khlit, rouse up that drunken dog, Ayub, and bid him take the standard."

Seeing that he had not finished speaking, the Cossacks merely nodded understanding, glanced up at the stars and waited.

"Break the barrels—pour out any brandy that is left. If you find a warrior carrying off anything, set him on an ox and let the Tatars goad him. If, when we are across the Volga, any son of a dog is seen drinking, flay his feet and tie him to a wagon tail. On the march, do not let your horses be heated—change saddle to a spare mount instead. Load your weapons before mounting and don't let any —— try to swim his horse across the Volga. It is too wide and besides the river is in flood."

He glanced once more around the square with its maudlin throng and lifted his head. To Kirdy it seemed as if the young *ataman* grew taller and sterner.

"*Nà kòn!* To horse!"

The group of leaders scattered at once, and the nearest Cossacks stopped their song and looked at Demid. The command was repeated from crowd to crowd, and after a last hasty cup the warriors ran toward the gates, pausing to kick up their comrades who lay stretched on the ground.

"Time to go!" they shouted, when the drunkards cursed and stumbled erect.

Immediately these began to stagger after their mates, picking up their caps and tightening their belts. Some—Ayub among them—paused to thrust their heads under a water pump.

The more sober ones had smashed in the kegs and tossed blazing brands into the vodka casks, and now vivid blue flames leaped up like tortured demons. In a few moments the square was deserted except for the reeling Muscovites who had stayed to the end. Ayub came up unsteadily, gripped the pole of the standard and leaned on it.

Kirdy sought first the stacked lances, then the horse lines. The darkness around him was filled with hurrying figures, yet surprizingly little noise was made. He heard saddles flung on ponies, and the brief jangle of bit chains, then the creak of leather and was aware of the black shapes of riders spurring in circles against the growing light in the east, lances projecting from their shoulders, their heads rising into the long sheepskin hats. When he was in the saddle of his piebald he looked for his other pony but found that the horse-tenders had driven it off with the remounts. A fresh, cool wind fanned the steam from his face, and he sniffed the odor of sheepskins and leather and horses.

The *kuren atamans* were calling out, low voiced:

"Goloto this way! Makshim this way!"

The lance points began to arrange themselves in ranks, and presently there was silence except for the stamp of a restless horse and the grunting of an ox. Kirdy had not been assigned to any *kuren* and for a moment he had the feeling of being astray, and that all the men were looking at him in the darkness. He edged over toward the wagon train and his stirrup struck against another. Some one swore at him softly and he tightened his rein, making up his mind

to go where he could see the horns and the buffalo tails of the standard outlined over Ayub's great bulk.

As soon as he had reached his friend he heard Demid's voice.

"*Rishĭy Marsh!* Trot!"

The wagons creaked, the oxen shuffled, and hoofs thudded on the earth. The squadrons moved toward the river.

"SMARTLY done and in the darkness, too," observed Van Elfsberg, who had gone to one of the towers at sunrise with the young *boyar* who was still yawning. "*Ma foi,* I thought we would have our hands full with the *sauvages* today."

"Ah well, Excellency, they haven't any tents to strike or baggage to look after, and they are regular wizards with horses. Speaking of wizards, may the plague take me, but there's one on that last wagon."

"Where?" asked the officer idly.

"On that bearskin beside the hooded eagle. I'm —— if it isn't the Tatar from the palace—what's his name?"

"Shamaki?" Van Elfsberg shaded his eyes and gazed at the wagon which was rumbling down hill in a cloud of dust. "I believe you're right, *mon ami.* But—if you will pardon a paradox so early in the morning, what do those devils of Cossacks want with a demon of a Tatar—and the Tsar's familiar?"

"May the foul fiend take them all! They do not know he is anything but a wagoner. Still"—

The *boyar* hesitated. Shamaki had the privilege of going and coming unannounced in the Tsar's chambers, with Kholop the dwarf, and the *boyar* believed that the old conjurer knew a deal of what passed in the palace. He was just as pleased that Shamaki was going with the Cossacks and not remaining in Kamushink because he might be a spy.

"I'll lay you odds, my captain," he went on, "that those vagabonds only go a little way into the desert before they circle back to their villages."

Van Elfsberg glanced down to where the dismounted warriors were waiting patiently to cross in the barges.

"Well," he shrugged, "I'll wager one thing—we'll have a long wait before they turn up, if they do, and —— little to drink in the meanwhile."

He pointed across the river. The sun had burned through the clouds and even now its touch was warm. It lighted the stretch of sandy hillocks and gray, lifeless reeds that extended as far as the eye could penetrate, to the dull wraith of mist on the horizon.

From the river's edge a snatch of song floated back to them:

"Women and horses
Singer and dancer
Fall to the lancer.

CHAPTER V

THE HAWK

AT FIRST the younger warriors scoured the plain in pursuit of deer and wolves. They raced after the scattered bands of Tatars who appeared on the sky-line, astonished at sight of the long wagon train moving steadily to the southeast away from the Volga. The Tatars were never overtaken because they wheeled away on their small ponies, darting into dense patches of thorn or leading the young warriors into sandy gullies where further pursuit was impossible.

The regiment was too strong for the nomads to attack and they knew better than to try to cut out the Cossacks' horses at night. They only rode up, often within bowshot, to stare at the wagons and at such times the *Donskoi* shouted at them good-naturedly.

"We are not going to splash you, brothers. We are after other game."

Once a shrill voice screamed at the Tatars from a wagon in the rear and every tribesman reined in his pony to listen. After that they did not appear again and the Cossacks spent a moment or so in wondering what voice had cried out from among the wagoners. As the days went on they were more careful of their horses for the grazing was steadily growing worse.

Because Demid wished to reserve the strength of his animals the *tabor*, the long Cossack wagon train, pushed slowly across the dry plain. There was no trail, but Khlit said that they needed only to keep to the southeast until they reached the first rivers that ran down to the inland seas.

Yet they made time. Before dawn the *tabor* got under way, guarded by one *kuren.* Then followed the herd of led horses,

wandering off to hillocks where the dry grass offered some sustenance, watched over by another *kuren*. The main body of riders brought up the rear, scattering to escape the dust clouds that sprang up under a hot wind.

Before noon the detachments would join where the *tabor* had made a halt, and here would be eaten the first meal of the day—mare's milk and barley cakes or cheese. After a rest the wagon train would push on to the spot Kirdy and the scouts had picked out for the night's camp. Fires were lighted, the oxen and horses cared for, guards told off and supper prepared—meat with perhaps a cup of brandy from the kegs on Demid's wagon.

Kirdy and the advance had little to do except to pick the easiest route for the oxen, and to wonder what lay beyond the unchanging sky-line.

For, after the Tatars had left them they had entered a land without rain or green growth, where the dew was light and the strong winds from the south were salty. Day by day they dropped lower and the heat haze closed in on them.

A week after leaving the Volga Kirdy made out a line of small, dome-like hills through the haze, and saw that the ground was streaked with gray sand.

"Ride back to the *ataman*," he said to one of his companions as soon as he was certain that the hills were real and not a phantasm created by hanging dust clouds and haze, "and say that we can camp this night on the first river, the Jaick* if such is his will."

The *ouchar* galloped off and returned presently with Makshim, leader of one of the best squadrons. Although among the *Donskoi* were men of many races—Gipsies, Hungarians, and Poles and even descendants of Tatars—Kirdy's father had been a Mongol prince—Makshim was different from the rest of the brotherhood. Though like many of his companions he had fled to the border to escape persecution or punishment as the case might be—no questions were asked among the Don men as to the reason why strangers joined them—he alone was known to be able to read and write not only his name but whole letters. Some said he had been a priest once, others, a Polish noble, and still others that his parents had been Jews.

Whatever his past, Makshim was a bold leader. Kirdy had noticed that while the other squadron commanders did not bother their heads about the route, Makshim asked questions of him and did some scouting on his own account. He was a slender warrior, evil tempered when aroused; the skin was drawn over his bones and his long red damask coat was faded by the sun.

When he and the young warrior had passed through the shallow ravines and halted on the far side of the low range, he surveyed the narrow strip of sedge grass and saw by the angle of the rushes that the current was moderately swift.

"It is a pistol shot across," he said, rubbing his saddle-horn reflectively. "Do you know where to find a ford?"

Kirdy shook his head and answered respectfully.

"Nay, sir brother, the river is deep because in the north where it begins the streams are still full."

"What do you know of northern rivers, fledgling?"

"Only a little. But all is known to my grandsire, who has crossed the roof of the world."

"The ——!" Makshim glanced at the youth from the corners of his eyes. "Just the same, the horses can swim this Jaick, but the wagons are a different affair. From this bank we could turn back to our villages, but once across only a magician can say what will be."

To this Kirdy made no answer. So far, all places were very much alike to him, who had been born in the Gobi and had straddled a horse in the year he had been weaned. In fact the silence of the many-colored desert was to him more of a welcome, as if to a home-coming, than a hardship.

That evening Demid announced that they would camp for two days while they made the wagons ready for the crossing and the horses grazed. Makshim alone spoke up:

"All this is very well, but have you considered, *Ataman*, that we will enter the lower desert in the time of greatest heat?"

"Then you'll sweat, Makshim," grinned Goloto, who was as ugly as Vulcan and never had a coat because his outer garments were sold whenever he had them for brandy or minstrels. "By the ten toes of St. Christopher, you'll shed your red coat."

*The Ural river. The Cossacks must have crossed only two or three days ride north of the Caspian Sea, where the Ural range sinks into the plain. They were already below sea level.

So far the Cossacks had not given Makshim a nickname, because he held himself a little apart and would not take a jest, but the damask coat came in for more than one gibe.

Now he grew red and spoke to Goloto rather than Demid.

"It is useless to push ahead into such a Satan's oven. Let us circle back to the Volga and await the rains and the cold. Then we can cross the gray desert more swiftly."

"Nay," said Demid at once, giving no reason.

"That is easy to say, *Ataman.* But in your pledge to the Tsar you did not agree to go over the desert in this month or the next."

Some of the Cossacks looked up at this, and Demid, chin on hand, pondered his reply until they who had been on the outskirts of the fire came closer to listen.

"That is not well said, Makshim," he observed. "There is a reason why we should press on at this time. You, sir brothers, are not falcons, to be kept hooded until the game is in sight. I have no secrets from you, and this is the reason.

"Urgench lies a month's ride to the southeast, and when we cross the Jaick we will be in the lands of the desert khans. Their city is in a dead world—the river is dry, the mountains are bare. In other days it was not like this because there was water in the river, and grass on the plains. But the city of Urgench is holy to the dogs of Moslems. No infidels have ridden under its walls. The mosques have old treasures—the Khan keeps his riches in the palace. And why is that, sir brothers?

"That is because they will not forsake the city that is holy since the time of their prophet—may jackals litter on his grave. In the season of greatest heat which begins now, the Khan and his horde leave Urgench for a month or so and ride south to Khiva where water is in the river and their horses can graze. So at this time we can ride against the city and take it, but not in another season."

"I fear no khan!"

"Arap Muhammad Khan of Khiva has ten thousand riders in his horde. To the east are double that number of Turkomans. Not far to the south are hundreds of thousands of Moslem dogs in the valley of Bokhara and Samarkand. So Khlit, the Wolf, has said."

Goloto swore and others pulled at their mustaches reflectively. The blunt statement of the power of the Moslems with whom they were to cope served to remind them that this was not an idle march, or a small raid.

Although Makshim had nothing more to say, Demid turned to him.

"You, *kuren ataman,* spoke of my pledge to the Tsar. It was not mine alone. Before giving it all the sir brothers heard the conditions and agreed with one voice. You yourself approved."

"And my word is not smoke," said Makshim promptly.

"See to it."

"By —— in Moscow, we were in bonds, now we are in the saddle," grunted Ayub. "What else matters?"

All spoke approvingly, and that night there was singing until the fires had died to gray ashes. In the morning the Cossacks took axes from the wagons and combed the river bank for poplars which grew on the east slope of the hills. They carried to the camp also the dead trunks that lay brittle and dry in the sand. The carpenters set to work binding the logs to the sides of the carts, and when this was done the wagons were fastened together by ropes in threes and fours.

On the second day the strongest horses were hitched to the carts and driven to the water's edge. Several riders plunged in to lead the way and the ponies were whipped until the carts, fastened together like rafts were afloat, the poplar trunks keeping them buoyant.

Other riders drove in the oxen and kept the frightened beasts headed across stream. The weaker of the oxen were lost in this passage, but the Cossacks and their horses went over safely. They attached their saddle horns together with lariats, Tatar fashion, in groups of twenty or more, keeping the line athwart the current.

When they climbed the steep bank and wound into the clay gullies that twisted before them the Cossacks glanced back and wondered, perhaps, how long it would be before they crossed the Jaick again.

KIRDY was well pleased when, instead of appointing an older Cossack in his place, the *ataman* named fifty warriors for the advance. Their labors doubled indeed, for now scouts were sent out on either flank to

watch for any sign of human beings. It was necessary to escape observation at this distance from Urgench, because even a Turkoman horse boy would have known that the Cossack *tabor* was not a merchant's caravan.

Moreover, the nature of the land changed, and the *Donskoi* who had never been in such a desert before, looked about curiously. The soil underfoot grew whiter, and the buttes that reared their heads above the gullies were sometimes red sandstone, sometimes white chalk. Kirdy had to ride in great circles to find water for the nightly camps.

They passed south of the blue crests of distant hills, and plunged still downward, still to the south and east. The only herbage here was a greenish-gray, almost the color of the sandy clay from which it grew and the ponies that ate of it grew weaker at once.

No longer did the Cossacks sing. They passed through ravines walled in with ridged sandstone that looked as if it had been carved by some gigantic hand in forgotten times; they plowed through lakes of sand, threaded with streams that were crusted with white salt, and the water, too, was unfit to drink.

"Aye," said the Cossack who was called Dog-Face, to Ayub. "you have said it. Foul fiends live in this place."

He jerked up his pony's muzzle from a pool of stagnant water and swore blackly. Dog-Face had stripped himself to the waist and revealed a trunk as splendidly formed as his face was grotesque—lithe muscles curving over bones as erect as pillars. The *kalpak* was thrust over one ear on the back of his head and stayed there by some unknown trick of adhesion. His sheepskin was bundled up on the crupper and the saddle bags were stuffed with hay he had cut a week ago — having emptied out cups, shirts, wax, and a remarkable lot of trinkets to make room for the hay.

"It is clearly to be seen," he went on. "The water is poison, the grass is death to the beasts; rock slides apart like sand, and sand stands up like rock."

He spat to one side and wrenched the sweat off his eyes with a finger.

"I have seen the shores of Tchárnomor,* and the venom-marshes of the Pripet; I have seen the Dnieper flood its banks and trees stick up from the water like bristles on a pig, but the like of this I have not seen."

"Then you are easily frightened, like a nun," retorted Ayub who took the opposite side of the argument at once.

"How, frightened?"

"The Wolf, who has wisdom, says that all this spot was once the bottom of a sea. The little Blue Sea was part of it, and the salt lakes and streams. Now the great sea has gone, but these mounds were islands once, and these gullies were channels. The salt and the chalk was left by the sea."

"But where did it go?"

Ayub thought for a moment and shook his head.

"Well, perhaps it dried up like a fish in the sun. How should I know? But once ships were sailing about up there, over our heads."

Glancing up, Dog-Face pondered this.

"I believe that you are lying. It is well known that you are a father of lies."

Thrusting out his lower lip, Ayub reined in his horse.

"Then you are a fool if you don't know false from true."

"I dare go beyond where you would set your foot. But to ride into a place accursed is another matter. I tell you Satan is near us."

"Then you should be glad," girded Ayub.

"Death to you!" growled the Cossack, reaching for his saber.

Not an instant behind him was Ayub, but before they could bare their weapons a brown stallion thrust between them and Demid glared from one to the other.

"Show steel and you will taste a bullet!"

Ayub's forehead went dark.

"No harm in a quarrel between *kunaks*."

"No harm," assented Demid, "but it is against Cossack custom to draw steel on the march. Greeks and Tziganis use knives, and that is not our nature. Pound each other with fists after the halt tonight."

That evening Dog-Face sought out Ayub and they fell to blows.

After Ayub had knocked his antagonist senseless, the Zaporoghian went off and returned with a goatskin of water which he poured over the prostrate Dog-Face, in spite of the fact that they had very little water.

The *tabor* pushed on slowly through the waste lands, as a panther, crouching close to the earth, pulls itself forward one leg at a time, waiting for the moment to launch its strength in a single spring.

*The Black Sea.

TO BE CONTINUED

In the BLIZZARD

by

LESLIE McFARLANE

A Complete Novelette

Author of "The Black Suit," "An Impostor," etc.

THEY were to hang him in the morning. The hour had not been set, but it would probably be shortly after dawn.

The newspapers, following eagerly at his heels to the last, said he had been bearing up well and, now that the quarry was definitely facing doom, magnanimously sought to glorify his coolness and his courage. He had been eating heartily, they said, and had even taken on weight since his trial. He was not moody and was, to all appearances, resigned to his fate. The newspapers gave intimate details, told what he ate and what he wore and what he read.

These details had suddenly become very important. People read that Daniel Ward had been earnestly reading the Bible in the past few weeks. "Well, well," they said, "imagine that!" and bought another newspaper next day. They read avidly all the accounts and speculated with snug thrills upon the probable emotions of the murderer. The district jail became a place of terrible and gloomy fascination, and people went out of their way to pass by it in the evenings while returning home, to stare at the barred windows and fancy that each passing shadow was that of the condemned man.

They were to hang him in the morning. His old father, whom everybody pitied, would visit him for the last time at about nine o'clock in the evening. He had asked a man to accompany him, a man who had been his friend for many years—a lawyer who had defended his son. He feared to face the ordeal alone.

"It's not," he said as they trudged down the snow-covered streets toward the jail, "that I'm afraid of breaking down, but just—just that I want some one with me."

The lawyer understood. The father had been very brave throughout. The lawyer had not consoled him, had not offered sympathy, and for that the old man had been grateful. He had never been an emotional person. Always he had maintained a rigid coldness, a calm acceptance of whatever life had to offer, and the studied composure of his friend had enabled him to maintain his attitude. So he had been grateful because the lawyer had not, like the others, slobbered platitudes and blubbered condolences, flaying the raw fibres of his soul. He suffered enough in silence. It was something to him to have maintained a steely composure before the world.

A storm was rising, they saw, as they went down the street. This was in northern Ontario in a little town on a February night. And it was very cold. The wind swept down the wide road, not in fitful gusts, but in a steadily rising gale, and the snow drifted before it, silently, steadily, in a persistent white mist, rising from the roadway and the steep snowbanks along the sidewalks. Lights shone comfortably from the windows of houses, and the street lamps flared

bravely, with snow swirling in their bright circles of radiance.

They were going to see Daniel Ward, the murderer, who would be hanged in the morning. People in the trim little houses were even now reading the papers which assured them that the doomed man was unchanged in demeanor and that last efforts to obtain a reprieve had failed.

So there would be no reprieve! Well, well. After all, mused the people, why should he get a reprieve? He was a cruel-hearted murderer if ever there was one, and hanging was too good for him. Still, thought gentler souls, it was a pity when one came to think of it. That a man should be hanged. Any man. So soon, too. Only a few hours. Wouldn't like to be in his shoes. Just the same, society must be protected. With this comforting generality they dismissed any disquieting thoughts that might have arisen regarding their own responsibility as members of society. What are we to have laws for if we don't enforce 'em? And so the people read and chattered and shivered inwardly at thought of the morrow.

They had read so much about Daniel Ward in the past few months and they had talked about him at so many meal-times that it was as if they were losing an old friend. Nervous women would not sleep tonight, for a shadow hung over the town. Oldsters recalled that it had been twenty-five years since there had been a hanging at the district jail. The massive, barred building now seemed like an ugly blot on the pure whiteness of the town, and an invisible presence hung over it, ready to swoop quietly down in the morning and carry away the soul of Daniel Ward at the bidding of his fellow men. It was not comfortable.

The storm was growing in violence. The snow slithered against the black window panes. People stayed in their houses and wondered if the storm would interfere with preparations for the execution. They wondered if the trains would be held up; if the hangman would arrive. They were assured, with delightful thrills, that the hangman had already arrived, and that he was even now registered at the Continental House. When they learned that he was registered under an assumed name, they forthwith felt privy to a dark and horrible melodrama.

THE district jail was a gloomy building of red brick. A high red fence with spikes and broken glass at the top ran along either side, allowing room for a yard at the back. The court-house beside the jail was a rambling structure of brick and stone, and was in heavy darkness. Strong electric lights shone in the portico of the jail.

The old man and the lawyer went up the paved walk. The force of the wind was broken as they ascended the stone steps, although they could hear the rising whistle of the gale above. A guard opened the door to their knock. They were expected.

"A stormy night, sir," said the guard as they stamped the snow off their feet in the little hallway.

"Very stormy," replied the old man briefly and as casually as if he were entering church.

The governor of the jail came out of his little office. He was a slight, timid little man with a wispy mustache, a bald head and kindly, ineffectual blue eyes which peered through steel-rimmed spectacles. It was the eve of the first hanging in his jail, and he was ill at ease, but anxious to do the right thing. His face was worried, but he strove to be cheerful.

"Good evening," he greeted in a sepulchral whisper, as if Daniel Ward were already dead. "Won't you come in and get warm?" He motioned to his office, cosy and brightly lighted.

"Thank you, no," said the old man. "I think I'll go up right away. How long am I allowed?"

"There are rules, of course," said the governor vaguely, "but we won't be too strict. Not too long, of course. You will want to see him alone?"

"We'll go in together," answered the old man, indicating the lawyer.

This surprized the governor but, after staring for a moment as if he did not understand, he motioned to the guard, who forthwith proceeded upstairs, and the two men followed.

They passed through corridors, brightly lighted, and there were barred doorways, through which they could catch glimpses of faintly stirring figures, faces pressed against the steel.

The old man glanced neither to right nor to left. His gaze was fixed upon the heels of the guard—the fat, clumsy heels of the

guard, and he walked up the flight of steps following, steadily and mechanically. At the end of the corridor they paused before a barred door. It opened into a long cell with a high, barred window. The walls were whitewashed, an electric light glared brightly in the centre of the ceiling and, on a low cot at one end, sat Daniel Ward, reading.

He looked up as the key grated in the lock and put the volume to one side. He clasped his strong, white hands over one knee as they came in.

The door clanged. The guard began to walk slowly up and down the corridor. He was a fat, good-natured fellow, the guard, obsessed by curiosity, and he listened with all his ears to everything that went on within the cell.

"Well," said Daniel Ward, "it isn't long now, is it?"

He had inherited much of his father's quality for composure. That composure had been greatly featured in the newspapers. He had what is known as a poker face. He seldom betrayed emotion. He was enigmatic. He was tall and strongly built, with a shock of dark hair, a firm, white forehead, a prominent nose and an aggressive jaw. His lips were thin, a bit cruel. His ears were prominent. He had a fine neck, and it rose from the opened collar of a rough, white shirt. He wore no coat, for the cell was warm. He looked calmly at his visitors and nodded in greeting.

"I have come to say good-by," said the old man.

Under the strong light one could see how fine was his skin, how silver his thin hair. His face seemed carved from marble. It was white and there were few lines in it; only two stern wrinkles about the corners of his mouth. His eyes were blue and clear. He was quietly dressed in a heavy, black overcoat over a neat, dark suit, and he wore sensible felt boots. He had placed his sealskin cap upon the floor. Quite an ordinary looking old man in appearance save for the uncompromising rigidity of his face, and that gave him a certain patrician air, imbued him with an unassuming dignity.

"There isn't much to say," said Daniel Ward.

His voice was flat, lifeless. One disliked him instinctively. His coldness masked cruelty, while his father's coldness cloaked a kind heart and a sensitive soul. Perhaps he had been spoiled. It was certain that he had never worked. A small town smart Alec, strong and vigorous, he had gone down from an idle boyhood through the various stages until he had taken to preying upon others for his livelihood. Egotistic, contemptuous of authority—now he was where he was.

"You are ready?"

"Oh, quite," said the younger man carelessly. "I may as well be ready."

The old man nodded. He gazed at his son intently as if trying to read the thoughts behind that white, immobile face.

"You know," he said, "how I feel about this."

"I know."

It was apparent that they understood each other. They said more in that brief interchange than ordinary men would have said in an hour's sentimental chattering.

For the old man conversation was now superficial. He had suffered so much that nothing could hurt him any more. Sorrow had left him dry and empty.

"I am glad you are being courageous."

"There's no sense making a fuss. I had thought maybe—the reprieve—"

"It's been turned down, you know," interjected the lawyer.

"Yes. It's been turned down. The guard told me. There's nothing else. I'm all set."

"I'm very glad," said the old man slowly. "It would be hard for me if you took it the other way."

The younger man nodded.

"Storming outside?" he asked of the lawyer.

"It's very stormy."

"Glad I'm not out in it." There was not the flicker of a smile.

"You have nothing," said his father with difficulty, "nothing—in the way of a message?"

The younger man shook his head.

"What good would it do?" he answered. "Of course I'm sorry. Everybody knows that. I'm sorry I killed that fellow—not for his sake, you understand, but because it means that I'm going to be hanged. I was very unlucky, that's all. If the breaks had been with me I would have got away with it. But I lost, so I have to pay up. That's all. Writing messages won't do any good. The sooner I'm forgotten, the better."

His tones were harsh, but his demeanor was resigned. He had a queer sort of bravery. One could admire him in a way, because he did not weep and crawl at the eleventh hour. The father sensed this, but he looked directly at his son and said—

"And you have never felt remorse?"

A harsh laugh.

"Never."

"It would be more fitting," said the father sternly. "He left a wife and a child, you'll remember. You took him away from them."

"Oh, I know." Another man might have tried to avoid this aspect, but Ward was cold-blooded. "They'll get along. There are lots of widows and orphans in the world. He should have thought of them. I needed the money. He shouldn't have put up such a fight. It was his own lookout. He knew I meant business when I held him up. He had nothing to lose. It wasn't his money. These pulp companies shouldn't let their paymasters carry such a roll around with them anyway. It's only a temptation. If he'd come across quietly, no on could have blamed him, but when he kicked up such a fuss and made for his gun there was nothing for me to do but bump him off or he'd have got me. It's tough about his wife and kid all right, but he should have thought of them. Probably they're just as well off without him, anyway."

The dry callousness of his words made the old man wince. He got up quietly, trembling ever so slightly.

"I'll not be staying any longer," he said. "I'm glad you are brave, but I hope you have a change of heart by morning. No doubt you will. It is not good to meet death without repentance."

"What difference does it make?" said the condemned man lightly. "Death ends everything. There's nothing after."

"This time tomorrow you will know."

"This time tomorrow I'll know nothing. I'll be blotted out."

"Your body, perhaps. Not your soul."

"The old line of stuff, dad. You know I don't believe it."

One had a feeling that his father always bored him. The lawyer felt intensely sorry for the old man then, for he could not hide the hungry expression in his eyes as he looked at the white-shirted young man seated on the cot. He nodded, however, like a physician completing a visit.

"Good-by, then," he said, and put out his hand.

The young man got up and extended his hand. They clasped. The two, father and son, looked into each other's eyes for a moment, the older man proudly, the younger with a sort of reckless defiance of what he saw in his father's gaze, and then their hands fell apart.

"Good-by," said Daniel Ward.

THE guard had opened the door of the cell. He was a stocky, mild-mannered individual with red hair and a square, red face. He was gazing curiously at the parting, his mouth half open, absent-mindedly chewing at a wad of gum. He reminded the lawyer at that moment of a calm old cow in a field, watching a train go by. He opened the door wide to let the lawyer pass through, and stared blankly as Daniel Ward strode easily along behind his father, like a host seeing his guests to the door.

Suddenly Daniel Ward gave a wild leap past the old man, out the door, shoving the lawyer ahead of him against the guard, and they stumbled across the corridor to the opposite wall from the force of the impact. There was a shout from the guard, a cry from the old man, a smothered exclamation from the lawyer, and they turned swiftly to see the white-shirted figure gliding rapidly down the corridor. He reached the top of the stairs and disappeared down the steps in great jumps.

"He—he—he's got away," stammered the guard, turning upon the others a frightened stare of unbelief.

The incredible had happened; the murderer had escaped. It took several seconds for the guard to collect his wits, it had all happened so quickly. He was a placid, thick-headed yokel, and this had been the first time in his experience that a prisoner had tried to escape. He lumbered down the corridor, shouting heavily, and clattered down the stairs. The other men followed.

At the top of the stairs they could gaze down two flights to the floor below. They were just in time to see the white shirt flash across their line of vision, just in time to see the governor hurry out of his office and stagger back as a fist caught him flush on the jaw. The blow hurled him back into the doorway, against another man who was

emerging, and then the great front door of the district jail thudded dully.

They ran downstairs and, as they ran, a bell began to clang wildly. It shattered the stillness of the corridors with brazen reverberations, and hoarse shouts arose, and the thudding of feet. There was a shot. When the lawyer and the old man reached the governor's office they found him standing in the doorway, his eyes wide with astonishment, his face harassed, stammering orders that no person obeyed, while guards ran hither and thither aimlessly, putting on coats, looking for rifles. The place was badly organized, and the governor was weak. In this moment of stress he had lost control altogether.

They went out onto the portico. A man was running up the walk shouting to no one in particular that Ward had gone down the street. He came blundering up through the driving snow, stared wildly at the two men on the steps and ran into the jail again, emerging a moment later clutching a rifle. Other guards tumbled out and scattered past into the darkness of the storm. The governor, pulling a cap about his ears, scurried out and ran down the steps.

The storm had grown in fury. The wind was whooping about the corners of the jail and rattling at loose tins on a near-by roof. The tins set up a terrific banging. Snow was sweeping across the open space in front of the jail; the court-house loomed dimly through the shifting whiteness; the arc light on the corner was almost obscured.

Men ran hither and thither, their dark forms rising and falling out of the storm, appearing and disappearing. The wind jeered at them and impudently flicked sheets of snow into their faces.

Daniel Ward had escaped.

STORM had been threatening when the night stage left Ville Marie, twelve miles down the lake on the Quebec side. From the hotel, Pierre Miron, the stage driver, could see the light mist to the north which heralded a blow, and people round about advised him to cancel his trip. There were only two passengers, a woman and a child, and it was not worth while, they said, to make the long journey in face of a storm for two people.

"I nevaire miss trip all winter yet," said Pierre, his white teeth gleaming in a smile as he hitched up his team. "We get through all right."

"She can wait till tomorrow just as well," some one suggested.

"Mebbe so," said Pierre with a shrug. "She tol' me she should go down to Haileybury las' week. But no, she wait till now. Her husban's lawyer man want for to see her right away but she tol' him no."

"Why?"

This was interesting. Every person in the little village knew the woman, they all knew her history. They had known her from a child, but now there surrounded her that mingled interest and curiosity people bestow upon a leading character in a tragedy. She was a creature set apart, removed from the common run, because death had dealt with her so unkindly. She was the widow of the man slain by Daniel Ward, the murderer, now awaiting death in the jail across the lake, and as such she had been invested with a morbid and somber distinction. Since the trial she had been living at her old home, an object of pity, of commiseration, of curiosity.

"She say," declared Pierre to the idlers in the hotel yard, "she say she would not go so long as dat feller Ward he was in de same town. Her lawyer man want for her to come down before dis, but no, she stay here till after he get hung. She not want for be in same town as heem so long as he still alive." He spat with relish into the snow. "She hate dat man a lot, I guess, no? But the stage, she not make no more trip dis week so she have to go tonight, and her lawyer man wrote an' tol' her he can't wait no longer. Pouf! We make it all right. Dis storm, eet is not'ing. W'y I remembaire storm t'ree year ago—"

He was off into epic reminiscences.

The woman, carrying a baby in her arms, came slowly across the hotel yard and Pierre sprang forward to open the door of the stage for her, gallantly doffing his cap, while the idlers stared sheepishly.

The stage was like a little house on runners, a gay little house, for it was covered with canvas in wide blue and white stripes. Pierre's stage was his pride. Compared to the stage from Guigues, now, which was merely covered with black tar paper, he considered it a traveling castle, a delight to the eye of all beholders. Like all the lake stages, it had a little stove inside, and there was a stovepipe sticking through

the roof, emitting a curl of white smoke. It is a cold drive across the lake in the depth of winter, even when one has plenty of fur rugs. There was a small window in front through which Pierre could watch his horses, and the reins passed through a slit in front of the driver's seat.

The wind was blowing into a gale when Pierre clambered through the door at the back and took his place. The woman, bundled up in the comfortable furs, held the baby in her arms and crooned to it softly. Her face was a pale oval in the cold, murky darkness.

The sleigh bells jingled as the horses trotted down the wide road out on to the lake and struck out into the approaching storm. It was like a thick, greasy cloud, far off to the north, and snow spattered against the little window now and then with sudden, vagrant gusts of wind.

Pierre attempted some slight conversation with the woman, but she answered only in monosyllables, so he lapsed intc silence and slouched down on his seat, into the roomy folds of his massive fur coat and grew somnolent as the horses jogged on into the gathering gloom. The woman crooned monotonously to the baby. The interior of the stage was fairly warm, as the stove radiated a good heat, and once in a while Pierre reached back for a stick of birch wood from a small pile under the seat, and opened up the stove. There would be a rosy illumination for a moment, the flames would crackle as they caught the birch bark, the stove lid would bang and darkness would prevail again.

The gale had increased in force. They were driving directly into the storm, and the village had disappeared behind. The lake road was marked out by small balsam trees, placed in the snow above the ice at intervals of about a hundred yards, and for a while it was possible to see as many as five trees ahead at a time. But as great sheets of snow swept across the road, they diminished in number, and at last it became almost impossible to distinguish even one tree ahead.

They would loom up suddenly out of the shifting grayness of night and storm and disappear again as the stage swayed past, gloomy little guardians of the lake highway. Pierre had no worries. The horses knew the road well.

However, as the storm grew worse he began to have anxieties. The horses were going slower now; they ploughed through drifts that almost obscured the road, and once they seemed to pause uncertainly. He gave a tug at the lines and they went on, and in a moment he saw the dim shape of a tree at his right and he knew that they were still on the road.

The wind was so strong that it swept mightily against the sides of the stage and even rocked it to and fro. It was only a frail little box with smoke drifting valiantly out of the absurd little stovepipe above to be whisked away into the rushing snow, and it was out on a wide lake, in an immensity of storm which swept down unbroken from the north, across flat miles of lake.

"One beeg blizzard, eh?" shouted Pierre back over his shoulder above the clamor of the storm, above the constant swish and sweep of the driving snow against the sides of the stage. "I not think she get so bad."

"Will we get through?," called the woman faintly.

"Sure, we get through," assured Pierre, snapping the lines to encourage his good horses.

He could scarcely see the horses now, so furious was the storm. They were plunging doggedly along, heads down, in snow up to their knees, miraculously staying to the road which was a road no longer. Regularly the dim shapes of the trees loomed up at the side and disappeared again into the driving mist and storm. The little stove crackled, and sparks and smoke swirled from the stovepipe sticking through the roof.

So they went on for a long time, and at last Pierre began to strain his eyes for some sight of the far-off glow of lights which would mark the town on the hillside. They must be over half way there by now, he judged, and although darkness had settled about them like a heavy cloak he could see no haze of lights through the fiercely raging storm.

The horses plunged this way and that. They hesitated again. Pierre snapped at the lines, and they plunged on, but they were plainly in difficulties. He could hear nothing but the howling of the wind, and the faint jingling of the sleigh bells.

The stage was merely creeping along through the snow and the horses were plunging about uncertainly.

THERE must be something wrong. He stopped the horses and then, muttering something about the harness to reassure the woman, who was only a faintly stirring shape in the gloom, clambered out the door at the back and looked about him.

Momentarily, he reeled under the force of the blast. It was a hurricane, a tornado of stinging snow, madly howling and shrieking down from the north. He shielded his face with his heavy mittens and strode around to the front of the stage, struggling through the deep drifts. Clearly, they were off the road. There were no little balsams as far as he could see in any direction. He strove to retrace the track of the stage, but already the snow had drifted over the impressions of the runners and obscured them entirely from view.

He went away a few steps. The storm buffeted him, but he was a big man and he faced it squarely, although his long fur coat hampered his movements. Snow slashed viciously into his face; the wind pounded at him. The voice of the storm was a high, monotonous shriek now, unwavering, unrelenting. The snow drove in a constant, undiminished burst of fury. He floundered about in drifts up to his waist. He must find the road.

He looked back, and he could see the stage, a faint shape, behind him, with the horses huddled together. He must not go far away, but if he could only find one of the balsams that marked the road, all would be well. He struggled a few steps farther. He did not know whether he was going in the right direction or not, but he judged that they had not been off the road long, and he trusted to instinct to find it again, to instinct and his knowledge of the lake.

When he looked around again, he could not see the stage.

He became alarmed and tried to go back. The wind and the blizzard had obliterated his footprints two paces back. He hesitated. Was he going the right way? Every direction was the same; he was alone in a swirling mass of snow, with the wind shrieking above. He floundered ahead. Still no sight of the stage. Ah, his horses and that woman and the baby back there! He should never have left them. But he had been trying to do the right thing; he had tried to find the road.

He tried to keep cool, but he was naturally an excitable man and, in spite of everything, panic began to creep into his soul. He stumbled this way and that, beaten by the storm like a great tree, bowed hither and thither by the force of the wind. No sight of the stage; no sight of the balsams.

He went on. There was nothing else to do. He beat about in the snow, vainly trying to see the stage again. The blizzard beat upon him. His heavy coat was dragging him down. He ploughed through the heavy drifts, floundering about, and the wind raged at him, the snow slashed into his face, bitterly, relentlessly, like a triumphant and merciless enemy.

It was bitterly cold. Although he wore a heavy fur cap, pulled well down, he was conscious that his face was freezing. He kept his arm up before him to shield him from the penetrating cold and the snow that blinded him, but the cold crept about him like invisible fingers. After a while, he found that his nose was frozen, and he scooped up a handful of snow and rubbed it across his face vigorously.

Pierre staggered on. It seemed that he had been fighting the storm for hours, and finally an immense weariness seized him and, although he fought against it, knowing its meaning, the weariness continued, and the cold numbed him so that finally he forgot that weariness meant death, and he stumbled over into the snow. Some instinct made him rise again blindly, and he floundered on a few steps more, but the weariness was pleasant, soothing, and the cruel wind beat down upon him and made progress seem impossible, and again he sank down. He tried to struggle to his feet, but the snow was soft like an immense feather bed, and the cold now seemed curiously comforting. He lay there, face downward, huddled up in his great fur coat, and the snow swept about him and piled up in little heaps about his shoulders.

As he lay there, a faint, red glare burst out of the grayness far behind and it shone with a rosy diffusion through the sweeping sheets of snow for some time. Finally it died out.

BACK in the stage the woman had waited. The storm rocked the stage to and fro, and she could hear an occasional jingle of the sleigh bells as the horses moved uneasily about. She clung to the baby in her arms and wondered why the driver did

not return. He had been away a long time. It was very dark and lonely.

She nearly went to sleep, what with the monotonous howl of the wind and the sweep of the snow, and she roused herself with a start to find that it was growing cold. There was no crackling from the stove. The driver had not come back.

Alarmed, she got up and tried to peer out the little window in front, but it had become frosted over, and she could see nothing. There was a dim red glow from the bottom of the stove, and she groped about in the dark to find the pile of wood under the seat. She found a stick of birch and she opened the door of the stove.

The stage gave a sudden lurch. Doubtless the horses had become frightened. As they plunged about, a pile of live wood coals rolled out of the stove, on to the floor.

She screamed. The stage lurched again. The horses were rearing about in terror. Their driver was gone, there was no controlling hand upon the lines, and they were frightened. Flames began to flicker up from the coals, and a remnant of wood flared up brightly. The woman tried to stamp out the flames, but some of them licked the bark on the birch stick and it flared up with a swish. She dropped the stick. Flames crept over to the pile of wood under the seat and blazed silently.

The stage was rocking to and fro like a ship in a storm, and the woman, snatching up the baby from among the furs, stumbled out the door at the back into the snow. She was just in time, for the whole interior of the stage was burning now. It was of flimsy construction, and soon it was burning brightly with a sullen roar. The horses reared about, frantically, kicking up great clouds of snow into the teeth of the sweeping sheets hurled down by the wind. She ran around, still clasping the baby in her arms, to try to release the animals from the harness, but there was no holding them now. They plunged about so much that she did not dare go near them and, as the flames rose higher and the roar of the burning stage vied with the roar of the storm in a high frenzy, the horses, terror-stricken, bolted and careened through the drifts, maddened, unable to shake off the blazing fury at their heels.

The flaring torch disappeared into the blizzard. The woman sank into the snow. The storm raged.

She hugged the baby closer and gazed despairingly about, but there was no hope in the pitiless sweep of the blizzard, no sympathy in the clamor of the gale.

Her mind was numbed with terror, for the forces which enveloped her were so huge and she was so small in that immensity of storm that it seemed she must be crushed immediately. Her concern was not for herself, but for the baby, warm and comfortable in shawls and a huge blanket. She moved a shawl aside and peered at the little face of the child through the gloom. She saw that it was sleeping, sleeping softly, and tenderly she drew the shawl over its face again so as to protect it from the cold but allow it room to breathe.

She rose and attempted to struggle a few steps through the storm, but the snow was too deep, and the wind was so strong that the mere effort of opposing it robbed her of strength, and she sank back again.

The blizzard raged furiously; the wind whooped. She was so small, so helpless in that inferno of storm. The snow would engulf her, the sweeping gale would drift heaps of snow about her form and she would be hidden from view.

She began to sob hopelessly, not for herself, although the love of life was strong in her, but for the baby—so young, so tiny, so helpless, so adorable, to die this way. She held the child closer with a fierce, maternal intensity.

It was very cold; she could feel the chill gripping her slight body, and she drew the blanket closer about the baby, held the infant tighter in her arms as if to impart to it all the warmth and all the life that was in her own body. She was blinded by the snow; she was conscious that it was drifting high about them, and she could hear nothing but the savage roar of the storm. Darkness shrouded them. The blizzard engulfed them.

THE old man and the lawyer reached the street, the wide, storm-swept street, and they met the jail governor running back through the snow. He had not taken time to put on an overcoat, and he was shivering with the cold; his shoulders were hunched up, his teeth were chattering.

"He's heading—for the lake," panted the governor as he passed them.

The lawyer looked at the old man. He

was buttoning his coat up tightly, and he had pulled his sealskin cap down about his ears. His features could not be discerned; the swirling snow surrounded them, and they were only tall, dark shadows to each other, keeping step. The father had not spoken.

"Better that they catch him. He'll freeze to death," said the lawyer dryly. "In a storm like this—"

The old man's answer came back faintly through the roar of the wind and the constant swish of the driving snow about them.

"I shouldn't say it—but I hope—I hope he gets away."

This was only natural. Daniel Ward was his son. But the lawyer had little hope that Daniel Ward would get away. Unless friends gave him shelter, he would perish in the storm, coatless, hatless as he was, and if friends did shelter him, it would be but a matter of a few days at the most before he would be recaptured.

Behind them they could hear the roar of an automobile, trying to force its way down the road through the heavy drifts. It sputtered and roared spasmodically and then swayed past them in a cloud of snow. Men were clinging to it, standing on the running boards, peering ahead through the storm. Against the silhouette of the car, their rifles stuck out at odd angles.

The road led down the hillside toward the business section of the town. Although it was only a little after nine o'clock, the street was deserted, and the only lights were from the street lamps, each casting a little circle of radiance in the hazy blizzard, and these lights formed a long row of miniature moons which merged into a dull and obscure glow far down the street. The automobile disappeared, rocking and swaying, around a corner.

They went down the hill. The stores were in darkness, their wide windows staring blankly out on the storm-swept street. At the foot of the hill lay the lake, the wide, frozen lake, hidden in darkness and storm.

A block or so away they could see dim figures scurrying here and there, and once in a while they could hear a faint shout. The news had evidently spread.

A crash of glass from close by made them both start. The noise could be plainly heard above the storm. It came from the rear of a store close at hand, they saw, and although they stopped and peered through one of the big front windows into the dim interior of the shop, they could see nothing but ghostly arrays of snow shovels and saws, weirdly mingled with their own reflections. They were about to turn away when they caught a glimpse of a figure moving back and forth, then a white shirt which was unmistakable. It was Daniel Ward.

They were standing there, wondering what to say or do, and they were gazing at Ward as he took a pair of snowshoes from a stack near one of the counters, when there came a light tread in the snow nearby, and they heard a gruff voice.

"Any trace of him?"

They turned. It was the guard whom Ward had so neatly outguessed for his escape. He recognized them and touched his cap.

"Beg your pardon. Didn't know who it was. He seems to have made a getaway."

He glanced suspiciously toward the store window as he spoke; it was plain that he was wondering what had held their interest; men do not stare into darkened shop windows at night, during the height of a blizzard when an escaped murderer is abroad, without good cause.

The lawyer glanced at the old man and he saw that he was making an effort to speak. Twice he opened his mouth, twice he hesitated, and then the words came. His voice was low.

"In there," he said, motioning toward the store. "We heard glass breaking. We thought—"

"Glass!" exclaimed the guard in great astonishment.

He became immensely excited. He crouched low and stared through the window, stared through the reflection of driving snowflakes pictured in the glass.

"Breaking, you said?" he inquired, after a while.

"It sounded like a window," said the lawyer, dully.

The guard stared again.

"There's somebody," he stuttered at last in excitement. "Yes, by gosh, I do believe there's somebody—"

He tried the front door. It was locked, of course, but he had not thought of that. Then he ran around the side of the building, his rifle dragging in the snow. The lawyer glanced at his companion.

"It's just as well," he said, noticing the old man's paleness. "They would have

caught him anyway. Perhaps he might have been shot."

"It wouldn't be right," came the answer in a strained voice. "It wouldn't be right to let him chance it."

They stared in the window again. They were quite alone on the street. Sheets of snow shifted about them. They might have been merely looking casually at the window display.

They could no longer see the uneasy flittings of the white shirt, but finally they detected a slight movement, and then they saw the guard coming up through the store. He walked quite openly, looking from side to side, and when he saw the two men at the window he shook his head. He was puzzled.

Suddenly they saw the white shirt. It was close behind the guard, in the heavy gloom, having emerged from behind a dark pillar, and it came closer and closer, until finally they could distinguish the entire form of Daniel Ward as he crept slowly upon the guard. The latter, his rifle under one arm, was standing, swaying from side to side as he peered uneasily into the darker corners in the front of the store, without moving from where he was.

Then, like a tiger, Ward sprang upon the guard, and the two fell to the floor in a clatter of shovels which had been leaning against a pillar close by and which fell with the impact. The white shirt was uppermost.

They stood staring. It was like watching a motion picture. They saw the guard struggle to his feet, having wrestled Ward over his shoulders, but the young man was active as a cat and he sprang, his fist shooting upward. The blow caught the guard upon the jaw and he tumbled to the floor in a heap.

Hurriedly, Ward commenced to divest the unconscious man of his short, heavy coat, his moccasins and his hat, and when this had been done, he donned them himself. He glanced toward the window once and, if he saw the two figures pressed against the pane, he gave no notice, but worked swiftly, smoothly. Finally he grabbed the guard's rifle, picked up the pair of snowshoes from behind the pillar and disappeared into the shadows.

There were men coming up the street, half a dozen of them, looking this way and that, and when they saw the two figures before the window, they hastened up.

"See him?" they panted and then, recognizing the old man, became informative.

"Not a sign of him," said one. "Not a sign."

The old man glanced hurriedly into the store. He made as if to speak, and then kept silent. The lawyer laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

One of the men had gone nosing about the corner of the store, and suddenly he gave a yell, half of fright, half of exultation.

"There he is," he shouted. Then, in doubtful tone. "No, it's Bill." He called out, "Bill!"

Presumably Bill was the guard, now lying in the store, just beginning to stir.

There was no answer. The man turned to his companions.

"Quick," he called. "This looks funny. Fellow came out the back of the store."

He was away and the others tumbled in his wake.

They ploughed ahead through the snow in the shadow of the building, and then from in front came a flash of red and a shot sounded above the storm.

One of the men stumbled head over heels into the snow, and knelt there, cursing, clutching his shoulder, calling to all and sundry that he had been shot. The others wavered; they had no stomach for chasing a fugitive who might even now be lurking in the shadows, ready to put a bullet through any one of them. They came back, very solicitous about the wounded man.

One of them discovered the broken window at the rear of the store and went exploring. He returned shortly, shouting his discovery of the guard whom he had found lying on the floor.

People were gathering. News of the escape had spread throughout the town, and men, overcoated and collarless, came running down streets and alleyways through the driving snow. Everybody talked at once. Everybody had suggestions. The old man and the lawyer remained silent in the midst of it.

The jail governor emerged from the crowd and came over to the old man. He was distraught, flustered.

"You were helping him," he declared nervously in his high voice. "You were out in front of this store. You knew all along. You were helping him."

"I wasn't," replied the old man, shortly.

"We'll see. We'll see," said the governor, beginning to walk away. "Two men laid out by that son of yours. Two of them. One inside the store, and you out in front all the time. Both of you. You knew he was there—you wouldn't tell—helping him—"

He disappeared into the crowd, and his high voice could be heard as he gave orders in one breath and countermanded them in another. After a while he came over again.

"If he's got away—if we don't get him," he declared, "you'll have a lot of explaining. A lot of explaining. It was a put-up job from the start. Both of you were in it. I should have watched. I trusted you. I'll have you arrested for conspiracy."

The lawyer stepped forward angrily. He was incoherent with wrath, but before he could speak the governor was away again, and soon the crowd dispersed. They were to search every part of the town; they were to watch all the roads, and away they went into the storm, the governor shouting orders to which nobody paid any attention. Men scurried to and fro about the streets, scurried here and there in the driving snow like black leaves before the gale. Lights flashed in the darker alleyways.

AN HOUR later, one of the searchers found a fresh snowshoe print. In the lee of the tiny dock on the frozen lake he jealously guarded his discovery while a companion reported the news uptown and returned with a dozen men trooping at his heels. The snowshoe mark had been protected by the side of the dock, otherwise the driving snow would have obliterated it in a moment.

"Yes, siree," the discoverer was saying. "I was comin' down the shore and, thinks I, he's took to the lake, so I nosed around for footprints, not thinkin' to find any, of course, and here I finds this here snowshoe mark. He made it, all right. It couldn't have been nobody else. Think we'd better follow him?"

They looked dubiously out into the storm. The snowshoe print was on the Ville Marie road which led out on to a wide, storm-swept lake, dark, raging, formidable. It was a chaotic inferno of wind and snow, and the night was bitterly cold, enough to daunt the bravest.

"Sure we'll follow him," said a grizzled old fellow who had been on man hunts before. "He can't go far in that blizzard. We'll have to stick together, though, or somebody'll get lost."

There was a delay while snowshoes were secured from uptown, but at last a little group of searchers ventured out into the storm. The wind was at their backs, and they were bowed by the force of the blizzard; the night swallowed them up in a moment. They were following the balsams that marked the road.

"We had better go back," said the lawyer to the old man, who had watched the party set out onto the lake into the darkness. "They won't find him. Not in that storm. In fact I don't think they'll go very far."

The old man was staring out over the lake, as if his keen, cold gaze would penetrate the thick, implacable wall of driving snow that shifted and raged before him, merging into the thick blackness beyond. Somewhere out in that pitiless blizzard was his son, and out there also were his son's pursuers, and death might be the outcome. He wanted to stay, but it was very cold, and he was shivering, although he was not conscious of it, and after a while the lawyer succeeded in leading him away. The other stragglers, finding no excitement in staring out into a blackness that told nothing of the progress of the chase, had hurried back up the hill into the town.

They were just starting back, and the old man turned to gaze out into the storm again, when he saw a straggling group of shadows emerging from the gloom, emerging slowly, and he could hear voices, sounds whisked toward him on the wings of the blizzard.

They hurried back down to the shore, and there they saw the searchers struggling through the snow. They carried a dark form.

The lawyer glanced at the old man. He gave a sharp gasp, but beyond that there was no sign of emotion.

"What else could he expect?" whispered the old man to himself.

He thought they were bringing back his son. Frozen to death out in the blizzard or perhaps shot by the pursuers.

"Get him," said the lawyer dryly as the men struggled up the snow-covered bank onto the road.

"This ain't him," rumbled the grizzled old man, kicking off his snowshoes. "We found this guy layin' in the snow about a hundred yards out. Could just see him from the road. Looks half froze to death."

They were near an arc light which burned at the approach to the dock, and they brought the man over there.

"Let's have a look at him, Jack."

They turned the man over gently. He was unconscious, but he was breathing.

"Never mind tryin' to find out who he is," rasped some one. "Get him in out of the cold some place and pour a drink into him. He's near dead."

The others, however, had recognized the victim of the storm. He was Pierre Miron, the stage driver.

THE woman was conscious of some one bending over her. She was lifted in strong arms, and this roused her from the lethargy which had crept over her, and she looked up weakly.

It was a man. At first she thought the driver had returned, but then in the gloom she saw that it was a stranger, a young man with a cold, white face, and he was staring down at her.

She would recognize that face anywhere this side of the other world and he, in the half darkness, recognized her as well. She knew him for Daniel Ward, the callous young man whom she had watched for a long day as he sat in the prisoner's dock when he was being tried for the murder of her husband. And he, even there, out on the windswept and stormbound waste of snow and ice, recognized the pale face, the gentle eyes of the woman who had gazed so sadly at him from the witness box that day she told of her husband, the man he had slain.

Cold had numbed her and her recognition of Ward meant nothing at the time.

"You'll freeze," he shouted roughly above the clamor of the blizzard. "What happened?"

"The stage," she said, stupidly, wearily. "It burnt."

"Well."

He looked down at the woman and at the baby in her arms, and a queer smile played about his lips. To come upon them of all people just when escape seemed so sure. He had seen the glare of the burning stage, momentarily, through the storm some time before and he had been impelled to alter his course a trifle and head toward it. And he had found these two.

It seemed as if he had been tricked into this by an ironical Providence; he almost believed in a Providence now, when such things could happen.

What to do? He could go on; he could leave them there and plunge ahead through the storm, following the lake road, following the line of balsams, on through the bitter night to safety. Once on the Quebec side, he felt sure that he could elude pursuit. He could, on the other hand, return; he could help this woman and child; he could help them reach the town and life. If they remained, they died.

But to return meant death for him. He could not hope to bring them back to town without evading capture, and capture meant that when dawn came he would be taken out and hanged—hanged, as the judge had said, by the neck until he was dead. A most horrible phrase, that!

A little while before, he had been fighting his way through the storm, his heart singing with exultation in spite of the forces of nature arrayed against him, in spite of the cold and the night and the bewildering blizzard, for he was free and all the world lay before him. A fugitive, perhaps, with the hand of man against him, but free, nevertheless. Now, he was confronted by a great obstacle, and he must make his decision swiftly.

Life was dear and he was young and strong. He had dreaded death with all the healthy dread of those at the height of their vitality; he had been terrified by the prospect of quick oblivion. He recalled the long days in his cell, the dreary days that seemed to hurry ever faster in spite of their bleakness, the days that crowded frantically upon each other, hastening him toward the dawn when he should die, the awful days that could no more be stopped in their headlong course than the eternal torrent of Niagara.

He recalled the futile dawns, the bitter awakenings when he had risen from hazy dreams of days of freedom, to see the white-washed walls of his cell, the cold, barred windows; to realize with agonizing finality that another of the precious days of life had gone and that he was just a little nearer the inevitable doom than he had been the dawn before. Now, with freedom in sight, with the dark and storm-swept and seemingly illimitable vastness of the lake before him like all the unknown days of life ahead, he saw himself turning back, retracing his steps, delivering himself unto the men who would take him out in the morning and hang him by the neck until he was dead.

Instinctively, he took a step away as if to hurry on, but the sight of the huddled figures in the snow made him hesitate, and then, nodding his head, as if in answer to a command, as if in acquiescent response to an order he dared not oppose, he turned toward them again. The sight of the baby, bundled up in the mother's arms, faintly stirred his frigid heart and, having made his decision, he knelt down and vigorously commenced to pummel the woman, in a manner almost brutal, to restore circulation. She misunderstood, and cried out from the pain, but he pounded at her, mercilessly, and finally dragged her to her feet.

"You'll freeze," he said again, and commenced to guide her through the snow.

Surprizingly, she tried to shove him away from her.

"No," she said. "No, not you!" She struggled. "I hate you. I hate you. I'd rather die—"

So! She did not want to be saved by him. More irony. Roughly, he overcame her momentary struggles and dragged her along. He had his snowshoes, and he was able to support the woman with one arm encircling her, but she was a dead weight, without volition or power of movement after her first mood of repulsion had passed; half carrying, half dragging her, then, he set out into the teeth of the fierce storm, back toward the town. He knew where the town was, he knew where stood the balsams that marked the winter road, for he had come that way, and it was not long till they came to the first tree. The sight of it, blurred by the driving snow, bent by the furious gale, encouraged him and he struggled on, fighting the storm.

Going back! With escape so near at hand! With the snowshoes and with the storm at his back he could have beaten the forces of the blizzard, he could have outdistanced his pursuers. He laughed harshly. Evidently it was not meant that he should trick death in this manner.

One can't leave a woman and a child to freeze to death in the snow, no matter what the cost, no matter if the woman hated him so intensely she preferred to die rather than accept aid from him. It was very queer that it should have been *his* woman, *his* child. He could imagine the dead man jeering at him, enjoying this incredible jest. For it was, in a way, a jest, a prank of fate that the woman and child he had wronged should so innocently be the means of forcing the legal payment of his debt.

He knew that he had wronged them, in his heart he had always known that, although he had never had the courage to think of it. The sad, accusing gaze of the widow that day in the court-room had haunted him more than he would ever admit to himself. Oh yes, he had wronged them. In killing that fool, he had wronged that woman and child, themselves innocent of even the idiotic courage that had meant his victim's life. He had wronged them more than the dead man, for the latter knew not the injury wrought him, for him all wrongs and injuries were forever ended, but they had been left to face a long, dreary treadmill of lonely years, more solitary, more terrible than death. He realized, dimly, that justice was implacable, that it was ordered that he should pay and that there was no escaping.

He had been forced to throw away the rifle. The storm battered them. His arms were very tired, for the burden he had taken on himself was great, and the journey had become simply a mechanical progress against the cruel wind and the furious snow, meaningless, senseless, without beginning or end. The wind whooped, the snow slashed upon them in immense sheets, hurled against them by the gale, it stung his face; the cold was like fire; he felt the gripping pain between his eyes that comes with facing bitter storm. Snow dragged at his feet, the darkness was interminable, the blizzard was profound, huge, powerful, the winds bellowed with mighty voices.

Even greater would be the irony if, now that his decision had been made, he could not save them and they all died in the storm. How the high gods of the blizzard would shriek with glee! They must not die. He must save them. He bared his teeth in a snarl of defiance to the storm; he plunged on with renewed vigor and finally he saw a yellowish smear in the overwhelming, snow-streaked blackness of the night—the lights of town.

IT WAS dawn. The blizzard had died away. The darkness of the night had diminished, and there was now a sort of gray twilight. The yellow street lamps shone as if tired and dispirited after the night of storm, through the whorls of snow that the wind still flung

occasionally down the streets, scurrying from the tops of the high drifts in front of frosted shop windows.

A team of horses toiled up the hill, kicking up a cloud of crisp snow, and the sleigh bells jangled once in a while spasmodically, like drunken mutterings. In the sleigh, behind the driver, two men were huddled in the fur robes, stiffly, like corpses. One was the lawyer, the other was the father. The old man's face was rigid, his eyes wide open, stony, his features were bleak. He appeared to be staring into an uncompromising and inscrutable distance, cold and desolate, without happiness, without hope.

The cold had rendered the lawyer apathetic, the cold and a long night without sleep. He gazed at the old man with merely a faint stirring of curiosity. So men looked like this when they suffered, he considered. Not all men, perhaps, but men like him. He was suffering. One sensed it. What was going on behind those cold eyes? What cataclysmic upheavals of the mind? What rending emotions were twitching at those thin lips?

The old man was devoid of expression. It was not a pose. Suffering had only hardened his former stoicism. He was reconciled. He was ready.

The sleigh stopped, and the bells jingled as the horses stamped in the snow. The driver was rising stiffly, extricating himself from the fur robes in which he had been almost hidden. He got out of the sleigh, slapping his mittened hands together; his breath rose in drifting exhalations. Steam rose from the horses' heads.

The great red fence of the district jail rose before them, and behind it loomed the brick building with its barred windows. There were a few yellow lights, but most of the windows were a ghostly white behind the bars, almost indistinguishable in the dim light.

The lawyer noticed that there were several people standing about, huddled together, shivering, on the white walk and out in the road. Their coat collars were turned up, their hats pulled down, and they stamped about and swung their arms across their chests to keep themselves warm. They looked at the sleigh curiously. There was a whispering. Some pointed to the old man.

"Come," said the lawyer to him gently.

He shook his head.

"I'll stay here," he replied with difficulty, "until it is over. I've seen him for the last time. But I want to be near."

He stared down at the robe over his knees.

"You'll be cold," said the lawyer. "There is a restaurant over here where you may wait."

"I am not cold," he said simply.

The lawyer looked at his watch and saw with sudden surprize that it was close upon seven o'clock. So soon.

"I'm goin' over for a cup of coffee," said the driver. "I'll be back in a minute."

He swaggered stiffly across the road to a small restaurant near-by. The door banged behind him.

The sky above the jail was gray and cold; the wind was cutting, and it swept down the broad street upon the huddled crowd of people, little mists of snow rising and falling in its course. The light grew slowly, stealthily, outlining the bare stone steps of the jail under the dark portico.

The old man was looking up very intently. The lawyer followed his gaze. His eyes were fixed upon a window on the third floor, a barred window, beyond which a yellow electric light was shining, and as they watched they could see a figure pass, two figures, and after a while they passed again, returning.

From above the sill they could see a tall figure in a white shirt. He was straight, erect, his hands were clasped behind his back. He had a shock of dark hair. He was gone again. And when the two figures returned, they could see that the man with him was a minister, darkly clad. So these two paced back and forth, the length of the narrow cell, passing and repassing the window, and every time they appeared there arose a sibilant whisper from the crowd.

"That's him."

"Him and the minister."

"Hasn't got long now."

The jail loomed heavy and silent in the morning light. The people gaped. They were like insects scurrying about something too great for their comprehension. They were staring, curious. The mass of the jail overshadowed everything. It was strong, implacable—the law itself, realized in brick and steel and stone.

Back and forth, back and forth like a pendulum, the two figures passed and repassed, now visible, now hidden, now visible

again in the rectangle of yellow light crossed with long bars.

The door of the court-house near-by swung open and a little group of men emerged. They were pulling on gloves, fixing on their hats, as they came out. In the lead was a short, sturdy little man who walked with a jaunty step. He was about fifty, with a rosy, kindly face, and he wore thick glasses; he looked like a genial grocer without a care in the world. He wore a short, heavy jacket, buttoned tightly and comfortably about his throat, and childish, warm mittens. He outpaced the others, and stepped along at a brisk gait.

"Best Scotch I've tasted in a long while," they could hear him say in a careless treble.

Behind him came the sheriff, who had presumably furnished the excellent Scotch, and after him came four or five other men, looking very serious. They went up the steps and the door of the jail swung open before them; they vanished into the black gap.

Then a stirring, a nervous movement, an expectancy pervaded the crowd.

The old man was still staring at the yellow window, where the two figures passed to and fro. He had not seen the hangman and the sheriff enter the jail. It was as if he grudged even the last seconds; he wished every glimpse of his son that relentless time would allow him, and he had no thought for anything else.

The white shirt appeared in front of the window again, and this time remained there. In the background one had an impression of other figures, grotesque, shadowy forms, almost phantom shapes. There was a confused movement, back and forth, the cell seemed to be crowded with people, and suddenly the white shirt disappeared, figures passed and repassed hurriedly, and then the window was blank again. The black bars were outlined against the yellow light. Nothing else could be seen.

The whispering grew in volume, and it was excited, terrified, and became like the beating of great wings.

The jail was strong, gloomy, silent. The yellow light shone from the vacant cell. The window seemed like a solemn and ironical eye, gazing down upon the crowd, an eye which implied:

"I can see. You must guess."

The old man was staring at the high red fence, as if he could gaze through it, as if his piercing and earnest glance could penetrate the thick boards and see everything that was going on beyond.

His expression was stony. His lips moved.

"I suppose it will be all over in a minute now," he said in a dry, detached voice. "They will take him outside—"

"Don't talk," said the lawyer quietly.

He ignored his companion. He seemed to be talking to himself.

"I am very proud. It is sad that he should die. He was my son. But I am very proud."

His voice was devoid of emotion, but one sensed an unfathomable sadness, a surging sea of agony behind his words.

"It would have been very difficult for me," he went on, "if he had died in disgrace. They may think so," he indicated the crowd by the merest glance, "but we know how different it was. He brought them back—that woman and baby—when he might have saved himself."

"It was brave."

"It redeems him."

"And he dies—"

"Nobly."

The old man seemed for a moment about to lose his self-control, and he pressed his lips together sternly and bowed his gray head.

He raised it in a moment, however, and he gazed long and despairingly at the high, red fence, gazed with hidden and desperate anguish at the yellow cell window, then nodded his head simply, as if some one had reassured him of something he had doubted.

The driver had clambered back into the sleigh again and was waiting motionless, staring with dumb fascination at the fence.

"We'll go," said the old man.

So enrapt was the driver that he did not hear, and the lawyer had to nudge him, before he grasped the reins, reluctantly, and drove the horses on. The crowd, which had grown in numbers, scattered, staring, annoyed at having their morbid speculations interrupted.

The sleigh went on down the road and the crowd shuffled back and continued staring at the high red wall that told them nothing.

The light in the third-floor cell went out.

THE WOMAN GOLD MINER

by **Raymond W. Thorp**

PERHAPS the most unique character that ever haunted the early mining camps of the West during the gold craze was Mary Delay, a Frenchwoman. Unlike "Calamity Jane" of Black Hills fame, hers was not a rowdy, boisterous life, but one of continuous hardships in seeking the precious metal. She drove a four-mule freight team across the plains, swung a bull-whip with the best of them, and fought Indians by day and night throughout the trip.

Staking out a rich gold claim near the town of Central City, Colorado, this brave woman, with not a hand raised in her defense, held it against all comers of the claim-jumping gentry. At first she was regarded as easy pickings by the claim-jumpers, that is until they tried her out. And that is when they struck a snag in midstream.

One Sunday when she was at home cooking her mid-day meal, a neighboring miner apprised her of the fact that some one was digging in her shaft. Dropping her pots and pans, Mary Delay strapped a Colt's revolver around her waist, mounted her horse and rode to the mine. Leaping from the horse's back, she peered over the edge of the pit. A burly miner, with pick and shovel, was busy there. She called to him to come out. Without raising his head from his work, he refused.

"Look up here," said Mary Delay. He looked up, and gazed into the muzzle of her gun. "Come on up, I said! If you do, you live, but if you don't, I'll bury you there," she announced with deadly emphasis

Looking beyond the gun, into the determined eyes of the woman miner, the claim-jumper lost no time in obeying this last command. His gun was in a belt strapped round his waist, but he was afraid to draw it. As he walked to his horse, which was tethered to a near-by cottonwood, he flung over his shoulder:

"Lady, fur be it frum me ter dispute with you. The mine is your'n."

The reference to a dispute with one who had the drop on him was a good joke, and so he meant it, but Mary Delay, all business, gave no heed. Such incidents, happening almost weekly, were a part of her life. During the many years that she lived the wild, exciting life in the mining camps of Colorado, not one instance has been recorded when she showed the white feather in upholding her rights. In the parlance of the gold grubbers she was a "six-mule team, with ther harness an' coach throwed in." Her picturesque and adventurous life was recorded in all the newspapers of this country and in France, her homeland, though her complete biography was never written. She was always reticent on all matters relating to her birth or family.

Mary Delay, the most unique character in the history of Colorado and perhaps in all the West in the seventies, died in 1920 at the advanced age of eighty-four in an old château in Chaumont en Bassigny, Haute Marne, France. She was well-to-do, having struck it rich and banked the money while working through the gold camps.

FRIAR THOMAS*

by JOHN McCLURE

IT WAS just as the baker's wife was finishing the pudding that Friar Thomas knocked on the door.

"Snow is falling like feathers of fowls," said the full voice of Friar Thomas, bellowing through the chinks.

"Then why not come in?" said the baker, opening the door.

"I will if I may," said Friar Thomas.

The baker's wife was brushing flour from her apron as Friar Thomas came in. He shook the snow in a powder off his cloak and his cowl. From white, they became gray. His round red face beamed at the fire on the hearth and at the pudding. As he stamped the snow from his sandals, his rosary billowed on his belly.

"Sit on a stool and warm your feet, father," said the baker.

"Thank you," said Friar Thomas.

He sat down before the fire.

Friar Thomas was a buxom man. The firelight made him ruddier. He stretched his legs toward the heat.

"The heavens are telling a rosary of storms," said Friar Thomas, "and they are devilish deliberate, my children, in coming to an ave. If this is not the seventh night of the seventh day of the snowstorm, call me monk."

"God forbid," said the baker.

"So he will," said Friar Thomas, "for I am no monk, but a friar.

"And the road is hard to walk on for a servant of the Lord," said Friar Thomas, "with the snow to his knees and the wind whipping at his skirts. The way from the village is the worst road I know of in a snowstorm. And my hut, when I get there, is the coldest barn in England. But I have to walk the highway for the glory of the Lord," said Friar Thomas, "and a bit of hot wine might preserve me."

The baker's wife said she had cinnamon and ginger.

"And have you any food in the hut, father?" said the baker.

"Providence provides for the friars and the sparrows," said Friar Thomas, folding his hands on his paunch. "There is ample food in the larder, and the angels will replenish it. Providence, my children, never lets a friar go hungry."

The baker's wife said she had a pullet on the skewer, but Friar Thomas waved her away.

"Keep your food for yourself and your good men," said Friar Thomas. "I take what the Lord sends, daughter, as I find it on the highway. A bit of hot wine and a bite of the pudding is the most I will ask of you to-night."

"There is nobody makes a pudding any better than she does," said the baker.

Friar Thomas and the baker were busy at the pudding when two strangers knocked at the door. The baker's wife, with her hands in the flour, lifted the bar to let them in.

A gentleman and a lady up to their eyes in snow, stepped hastily into the kitchen. Their horses stayed stamping outside.

"Is it not enough to be riding in a snowstorm without being robbed on the heath?" roared the gentleman, banging his boots

* *This is an Off-the-Trail story. See footnote, on first contents page.*

against the floor. "Is it not enough, good people? We are frozen and robbed. Will you warm us?"

The baker's wife pulled a bench before the fire. Friar Thomas and the baker quit the pudding.

"What-a-blister is the matter?" cried the baker. "Robbed on the heath, you say?"

"None but a servant of the Lord is safe on the highway," said Friar Thomas, lifting his hands. "The day and the time it is, with the judgment nearing, no one can travel in peace," said Friar Thomas, "and God have mercy on our souls."

"Robbed on the heath," said the gentleman, "by as wild a buccaneer as ever breathed. Devil a penny he left us."

"Robbed!" screamed the lady, finding her voice at last.

"And what did this highwayman look like?" asked the baker.

"And how the —— would I know," roared the gentleman, "it being dark and the snow in my eyes and a point of steel at my gullet!"

"AS DASTARDLY roving a jack-o'-the-thicket as ever breathed in the world," said Friar Thomas in a booming voice, "to hold up a lady and gentleman in a snowstorm!"

The baker's wife had her mouth wide open, but she had nothing to say.

"A bit of the pudding would revive you," said the baker.

"And cinnamon and ginger in your wine," said Friar Thomas.

The baker's wife produced mugs and platters.

"You must tell us how it happened," said the baker.

"How it happened?" said the gentleman. "I have told you."

"And where did it occur, and when?" said Friar Thomas.

"Two miles from here at the most and half an hour ago," the gentleman said.

The baker's wife said it was very unfortunate they had to be robbed at all.

"The fiend was not human," cried the lady. "He does not know what he took."

Friar Thomas looked at the lady and the gentleman and turned his eyes to the fire. He folded his hands upon his stomach.

"Well, my children," said Friar Thomas, "a thing of this sort, after all, is to be considered as an act of God. It is lucky the highwayman, whoever in sin he was, did not murder the two of you. You are alive and well, your horses are sound, and the snow can not last forever. And a few shillings more or less can not bankrupt anybody. A thing of this sort is an act of God like any other. There can be no complaints against the wisdom of the Lord. We take what comes upon the highway, good luck and bad luck, my children," said Friar Thomas, "and, however disturbed you may be for the moment, a prayer will ease your hearts."

"Nothing eases a robbed man," said the baker.

"The solace of prayer," said Friar Thomas, "is a salve that will soothe all sores."

"But he does not know what it was he made away with!" cried the lady.

"The rogue will be damned for the trick," said the gentleman, "whether he hangs or not."

"All robbers are damned," said Friar Thomas.

"But the image of the Virgin that was in the wallet was blessed by the Pope," cried the lady, "and my mother always wore it on her necklace," said the lady, "before she was dead, and he stole it."

"Eh?" said Friar Thomas, pricking up his ears. "An image of the Virgin?"

"There was an image of the Virgin," said the gentleman, "in the wallet that he stole."

"An image of the Virgin!" cried the baker.

"Exactly," said the gentleman, "an image of the Virgin no larger than your thumb, made of gold and pearl and coral, blessed by the Pope at Rome."

"My mother bought it of a palmer," said the lady.

The baker's wife said it was very preposterous that one should steal an image of the Virgin.

"But he will be damned for it," said the lady. "Will he not, father?"

Friar Thomas gazed sadly into the fire and nodded his head.

"He will be damned certainly," said Friar Thomas. "But I am sure he did not know he stole an image of the Virgin."

"THE money does not matter," said the lady, "for more money is to be had. If that man were poor and hungry, I would gladly give him every penny I possess. But the thought of his taking the image of the Virgin—it is more than I can bear!"

And she began to shed tears, and as she shed tears she became much more beautiful than the baker and Friar Thomas had suspected. Her red cheeks flushed redder than ever and the golden hair under her hood that was damp with snow glistened in the firelight, and the tears that ran down her cheeks were like diamonds, and she was altogether more delightful to look at than the baker's wife.

Friar Thomas said as much to the devil, but no one heard him besides.

"I can not bear to think of it," cried the lady. "The wretched and loathsome creature—"

Friar Thomas held up his hand.

"It may be the poor rogue was hungry, my child," said Friar Thomas, "though I doubt it. But I am sure he never dreamed there was an image of the Virgin in the wallet."

"Nevertheless, it was in the wallet," said the gentleman, "and he took it."

"You are sure it was in the wallet?" said Friar Thomas.

"I have said so," said the gentleman.

The baker's wife turned her back as she saw Friar Thomas fumbling at his garters.

"There are recorded in the lives of the fathers," said Friar Thomas then, "miracles without end about the Virgin. They were performed by spotless men and saints in halos," said Friar Thomas, "and I know of none that was ever accomplished by a friar. A sinner like myself can not compete with bishops in heaven, my children, as you know, but miracles have been recorded," said Friar Thomas.

"That has nothing to do with the case, I am sure," said the baker. "The gentleman and lady have been robbed."

"Yes, but of an image of the Virgin," said Friar Thomas.

"And fourteen crowns, ten shillings, to say nothing of the rings and the ear-rings," the gentleman interrupted.

"We were speaking only of the image of the Virgin," said Friar Thomas.

"As you will," said the gentleman.

"And miracles have been recorded in the past," said Friar Thomas. "And how do we know what the present and the future may contain? An image of the Virgin is an article of virtue more powerful than magic or the arts of the devil," said Friar Thomas, "and it may not be amiss if we pray for a miracle in a case like the present. The ways of Providence are beyond our understanding," said Friar Thomas.

The lady by now was looking sweetly at Friar Thomas and the tears were gone out of her eyes.

She was pretty as a robin in the snow, said Friar Thomas to the devil, but nobody heard besides.

"And it would surprize me little," said Friar Thomas, "on a night the like of this, with the snow whirling down the chimney and the clouds low and robbers abroad on the highway, if a miracle occurred. For Providence remembers what the children of men forget," said Friar Thomas, leaning toward the baker's wife and talking to the lady, "and an image of the Virgin is an article of virtue—"

"But look!" cried the lady in a wild voice.

The banker's wife was sitting looking at the ceiling and the image of the Virgin was lying in her lap.

"Praise Providence!" Friar Thomas cried.

"It is the image of the Virgin from the wallet," said the lady. "There can be no doubt about that."

The gentleman was eying the baker and the baker's wife with suspicion in his face.

"It is a miracle!" the lady cried.

"It is not only the bishops in heaven," said Friar Thomas meekly, "who can do miracles, my child. Even sinners who wander as I wander in a snowstorm—"

The gentleman was looking queerly at Friar Thomas, toying with the hilt of his sword.

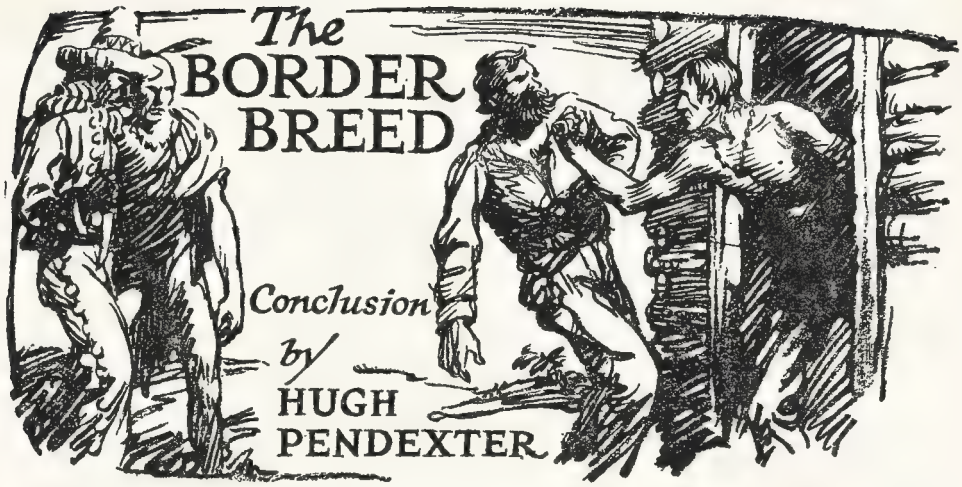
"We would pray for the return of the crowns and the shillings," said Friar Thomas hastily, "but such worldly goods it would be blasphemy to pray for. And besides, the night is growing late and I must be home. And may God rest the soul of the robber that would rob a lady and a gentleman in a snowstorm," said Friar Thomas, "and take away a wallet with an image of the Virgin."

"It was marvelous the way the image came to light," said the lady.

But the gentleman was eying Friar Thomas very queerly, and the baker's wife shuffled her feet.

"All things are possible to Providence," said Friar Thomas in haste, "and this miracle, I assure you, is no more wonderful than any. But God will you good night."

Friar Thomas winked at the baker's wife as he went out at the door.



Author of "The Bush Lopers," "The Homesteaders," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

I WAS born and raised in Tennessee. My earliest recollection is that of a comfortable log cabin at McBee's Ferry, on the Holston. My father, Jeffry Lang, I knew but little, for he was much away, engaged in trade in the Chickasaw country, and he died in my fifth year. Soon afterward we moved to Knoxville, founded three years before. This town held splendid associations for me—its massive blockhouse, the sturdy stockade, the unbelievable (at that time) splendor of the Governor's mansion. This was a fitting locale for the hair-raising recitals of the massacre at Cavet's Station in 1793.

My mother married Joel Snow, a rough but extremely fine type of frontiersman.

A close friendship grew up between my stepfather and myself, and he taught me much about woodsmanship and marksmanship. Not long afterward my mother died, and Joel and I took to wandering toward the Mississippi.

He had once testified against The Dancer, one of a notorious band of border marauders known as Harpe's gang. The Dancer was said to have died in prison, but in reality he had escaped, and even now was stalking Joel for revenge.

So we began to travel stealthily by night, making our way toward Kentucky and the beautiful Ohio, where we knew The Dancer would not dare to follow, for there his reputation was too well known. Near Harrodsberg we fell in with Bully McGin and his impetuous daughter. McGin inveigled Joel to take part in Aaron Burr's wild scheme to seize Mexico from Spain—a plot promising untold wealth if successfully turned. I was left much in the company of "Princess" Polly McGin.

At this time McGin and Joel were away for many days at a time on some secret mission.

Greenberry Spiller, a garrulous old vagabond and one-time preacher, decided our course of flight for us. His vivid word-pictures of the rich northern Ohio territory—the Promised Land, he termed it—would have enticed men far less gullible than ourselves. So we set out.

Breaking our way through almost impassable woodland, we found, instead of the flat lush meadows of Greenberry's stories, continuous wooded hills—woods so dense that the broiling noon-day sun penetrated but feebly.

It was at this time that Joel decided to stop running from Dancer—to become the hunter instead of the hunted. We pushed on till we reached the small Swiss settlement at Vevay. Here, in a brawl with some insolent river-men, we unwittingly gave aid to two Government agents in search of Bully McGin and his accomplice, Joel Snow. To elude them we left speedily for St. Louis. We stopped to warn McGin at his cabin, but he had already fled. We then took passage on a Virginia ark traveling down the Ohio.

Twenty miles below Shawneetown we came to Cave-in Rock, reported to have been the scene of many a gruesome crime of the river pirates. As we examined the walls of the cave, Joel noticed this legend, scratched in the stone with some sharp instrument.

Dancer—16

The inscription appeared to be of very recent date.

We reembarked on the ark, more than ever determined to succeed in our double purpose: to elude the agents and to kill Dancer. Finally we reached Natchez.

Those were hectic days in the summer of 1811. Our relations with France and England were strained and none too amicable. Internally, the Indians were becoming troublesome. And they were being organized by able leaders, head and shoulders above all of whom loomed the great Tecumseh.

About this time word came down the river that the McGins were back. It was true. McGin and Polly, both dressed in rich raiment, and both outwardly displaying an air of hauteur quite new to them, greeted us as amiably as of old. McGin was soon to die fighting Tecumseh.

"The Border Breed," copyright, 1925, by Hugh Pendexter.

Then the trouble with the foreign powers came to a crisis. War was declared against England, and I decided to join Hull's army that was moving toward Detroit.

I JOINED General Hull's army at Frenchtown. The army was camped on the United States' side of the Detroit River. Officers and soldiers alike were impatient to attack Fort Malden, near Amhertsberg on the Canadian side, but Hull vacillated and hung back until he was forced into action by an importunate letter from the Secretary of War, ordering him to lay seige to that fort. At last we began to cross the river in makeshift order that was anything but martial. Then Hull, adding a grievous error of military judgment to his unwarranted delay in assuming the aggressive, exposed a brave army to the deep shame of ignominious surrender, without a blow in retaliation or self-defense. That winter I languished in a military prison-camp. In the spring of 1813 I was exchanged.

Bored with things at home, and learning that General Jackson had taken the Tennessee Militia to Natchez by water, after refusing to disband his forces and to turn over all public property to General Wilkinson at New Orleans, I felt it advisable to join "Old Hickory."

Joel agreed grudgingly that it was best that I go. He invited me, however, to cross that night to Jeffersonville, where he was to meet an emissary of Harrison. That night an ominous storm raged as we reached the tavern on the other side. As Joel and I sat smoking and exchanging reminiscences, I saw a hideous face pressed to the dripping glass of a window. Dancer! I hurled my pipe at the window, and simultaneously heard the dull report of a pistol. I turned and found Joel in a heap. The best of men was dead.

I gave the alarm and sped home to give the sad news to Polly and Greenbury. Then I took to horse.

The news of others of Dancer's gross and petty misdeeds came to my ears as I sought to keep on his trail. At Hollinger's Ferry I crossed to Fort Mimms. Refugees were swarming the river and rapidly filling the one-acre plot enclosed by the stockade. Fear of Weatherford and his war-thirsty warriors was driving whole families from their homes to this place and any other that seemed to offer haven in case of a red attack.

The commanding general wished to take the initiative and attack the hostile Creek towns, but his superior was obdurate in his refusal to grant permission. I decided that I was needed here, so I signed up with the defending troops. Not long afterward I found Greenberry and Polly. She had disguised herself as a boy and had coerced Greenberry to follow me when I set out after Dancer.

The expected attack by the Indians took us by surprize. One sultry morning the whole stockade was surrounded by bands of howling, frenzied warriors.

When hope seemed gone, an old doctor succeeded in cutting through two of the stockade pickets with an ax. Then, in the midst of the confusion, Polly safely under my arm, we slid through the opening, and with a few others who used the same outlet to escape, we dashed for the obscurity of the outlying swamp. But fortune did not favor us. We were overtaken by three braves, one of whom Polly wounded with the long sword which she carried. Her brilliant red locks and fiery temper awed the Indians, for they considered her "medicine," or magical, and agreed not to molest her. I told the warriors that we were Spaniards and friends of Chief Weatherford. We were taken before this chief, who decided that Polly might go where she pleased, but I, who he knew to be an American and not a Spaniard, was to be sent to the peace town of Kusa, to await exchange—if exchange should ever take place. A string of wampum, the token of captivity, was hung upon my neck.

Soon afterward I learned from a negro who had likewise been taken at Mimms' Fort that Polly was at the red town of Imukfa. Many plans I devised for escaping, but none proved successful. I gained the friendship of the *miko* of this town because I rescued his young son from drowning. This *miko* saved me from the clutches of Long Claw, a minor chieftain, who bore me a murderous grudge.

News reached the town that General Jackson was on the Coosa River. The Indians immediately repaired to their council-house for conference, and that night when I was rather forgotten in the rush of new events, I escaped by the path that joins the Talapoosa and the Coosa. Suddenly the deep baying of blood-hounds broke the stillness of the forest night.

I STARTED to run, then realized the folly of depending on fleetness of foot with the path obscured by the darkness. The gaunt dogs, penned up at New Kusa, were racing furiously. I remembered those following Weatherford's army to Fort Mimms and how they had attacked the dead like starved wolves. Holding my pace at an easy trot, with the club extended to guard against collision with any obstacle, I kept a firm grip on my nerves and was soon rewarded by finding the path descending a short slope. I breathed more easily when my feet entered running water. The course of the stream was southwest, and I waded down it as rapidly as possible. At times I was but ankle deep, again I was up to my waist, or was forced to swim a few strokes. It was a black tunnel beneath the overhanging trees even after the last of the clouds were blown from beneath the stars.

All was quiet behind me and I continued feeling and splashing my way down the creek until the leader of the pack signaled that the trail was broken. Then I felt my way to the south bank and sat down in the water. The dogs had been held in leash until they reached the creek, for now I could faintly hear my hunters encouraging the beasts. Soon one came running along

my bank with an Indian some distance behind him, encouraging him to search closely. Similar sounds came from the opposite side of the creek, and I knew both banks, up and down stream from the spot where I had taken to water, were being searched.

I found a big stone and rose to my feet. My head was slightly above the level of the bank and I could make out a dark blur in rapid motion as a dog came along, his sensitive nose sweeping the ground. I knew I must leave the creek before daylight or be discovered, and this four-footed hunter blocked my escape. Did I gain the bank and continue my flight after he had passed, he would quickly find my trail on returning up the creek. I drew back my arm as he came abreast of me and opened my mouth to attract his attention. But he halted before I could make a sound, having caught the scent. For a second he was motionless and glaring into the darkness where I was standing. With all my strength I hurled the stone and at the same moment the brute started to leap. He shot from the bank and hit me in the chest and knocked me down. In a frenzy of desperation I sought to ward off his jaws, but it was some moments before I realized I was fighting an inanimate thing. I held the carcass under water to make sure, and I never knew whether the animal was killed, or merely stunned, by the rock which must have hit him in the head as he left the ground.

Satisfied he would never follow another trail, I secured another stone and crept to the bank. I would have given my Nashville house to have had back the club now floating downstream. I was up the bank and about to continue my flight when a man across the creek loudly called out—

"What is the noise in the river?"

Upstream, and on my side, a man answered:

"The dog must have jumped into the water. Hunt slowly."

This man now raced along the bank. I came to my feet beside a tree. As he came up I scuffed my feet and in a low voice asked—

"Where is the dog?"

The man slowed down and unsuspiciously replied:

"He must have jumped into the creek. Let Tall Reed go back to his side before his dog crosses to this side."

As if answering him, Tall Reed called from the opposite bank—

"Long Claw's dog makes no noise."

Long Claw was within five feet of me when he thus discovered he was not talking to Tall Reed. Almost as soon as he heard his friend speak he howled in surprize and leaped to seize me. I hurled a rock and then grappled with him. After the first violent contact of our bodies, I discovered his left arm was useless. Before Tall Reed could finish his excited queries Long Claw was on the ground, killed by his own knife; and I, armed with his knife and ax, was running in the direction of the Talapoosa. Behind me sounded hunting-calls, and wild questions as men on both banks of the stream endeavored to learn why their leader was silent. I knew when Tall Reed had crossed the creek and found the dead savage by his yell of discovery. And I knew his dog had crossed with him, for he bayed to his mates that he had found the trail. The dogs were far superior to their masters in quickly getting the right of the mystery. They were swarming along my trail before the men had gotten the true situation straight in their minds.

For a quarter of a mile I ran through thick woods and feared I must make my last stand in the growth. Then the timber thinned out and I was running across a wide opening. I ran until I came to a tree close by the path. I leaped behind this and hardly was in position before I detected motion. The dog came up, a vague blur swiftly skimming the ground. When I judged him to be within fifteen feet of my position I hurled the ax and instantly leaped after it with my knife. The ax hit the dog in the flank, causing him to snarl ferociously and spin around. I closed in blindly and more by luck than skill sent the knife between the ribs. Then securing my ax, I resumed my flight.

Although I had been successful thus far, I knew the dawn would find me helpless unless I could shake off, or destroy, the remaining dogs. I could hear them in the distance, calling to their dead leader for advice as I ran for the woods south of the opening. A ten-foot slope told me I had come to one of those artificial mounds which once marked the site of a council-house. As the purpose of the mound was to elevate the house above high water it also told me I was close to a creek. I stumbled into the

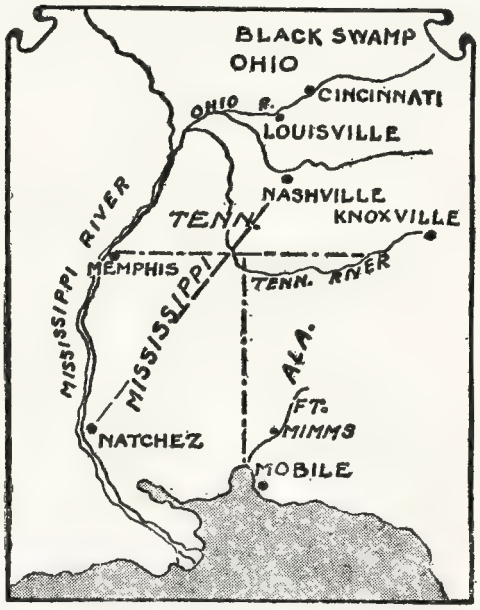
ruins of the house on the earth platform, a débris of poles, logs, and bark. It had been my purpose to find the creek and thus lose my trail; but as I was extricating myself from the fallen timbers I changed my plan. Several of the logs and rafters had lodged against what remained of one wall in such a way as to afford something of a shelter. I crawled inside the crude lean-to and barely had settled myself on one knee, ax and knife ready, when a snuffling brute was upon the mound and attacking my hiding-place. With a snarling growl he drove his head and shoulders between the logs and was forcing them apart before I could strike a blow. As the partly decayed logs began to give, I managed to land a blow with the ax, striking at random as I could see nothing. I struck again and with such viciousness the handle broke. The dog remained sprawled out with head and shoulders inside my retreat.

BY THE time I had shifted the knife to my left hand another beast was up the slope and assailing me. There flashed through my mind the picture of a poor colored man, fleeing from bondage and making no defense as the trackers ran him down. This animal attacked differently from the others. He reared and smashed against the logs and the whole weak structure fell to the ground. He reared and sprang upon me as I stood there clear of all barriers. He landed on my knife and snarled and snapped at my hand. But now I had him. I caught him by the throat with my left hand before I would wrench the knife loose. Several quick thrusts did for him. Then I leaped clear of the débris to continue the fight, but no more dogs appeared; nor did I hear them baying. I did hear the faint calls of the Creeks but they were helpless until day came to reveal signs of my flight. I slipped from the mound and soon was wading a creek. Taking my course from the stars I resumed my journey to Imukfa and Polly McGin.

Reserving my strength, I strode along and took time to visualize my position. I had placed myself beyond the pale when I left ancient Kusa. I had left a dead man, and a trail of dead dogs behind. My life was forfeited for leaving Kusa. It was forfeited for killing Long Claw. This realization brought a sense of reckless relief. No matter what I now did, I could incur no severer penalty than already I had earned.

The morning light brought no signs of pursuit and I hoped my trailers had followed down the little creek from the point where I had killed their dogs. Unless they happened upon signs of my flight, they scarcely would believe I was plunging deeper into the Creek country. They would expect me to make for the Alabama and General Claiborne's army.

When I finally withdrew to a thicket to rest I estimated I had covered twenty miles. The sun was rising when I threw myself down to sleep, and it was setting when I opened my eyes. I was satisfied I had broken my trail. My first work was to cut two stout saplings and to sharpen them to serve as spears. My next task was to secure something to eat. This was quickly done, as the growth was thick with squirrels and it required but a bit of patience to knock several over. With my steel and flint I soon had a small fire and broiled my game and ate it without seasoning.



At twilight I was traveling toward Imukfa. I had not gone more than a mile when unexpectedly a Creek man stepped from behind a tree and confronted me. Before I could recover from my surprize and attack him he was asking:

"Where is the white man going? He wears the wampum of Lamochattee."

"To Imukfa."

"If the white man goes to find Lamochattee he must walk fast."

"My red brother goes with me?"

He shook his head, saying—

"Tukabatchi."

The Creek continued:

"Lamochattee goes to Tukabatchi. My white brother can meet him there."

"If Lamochattee is not at Imukfa, his wampum will follow him down the river to Tukabatchi," I replied.

"My white brother carries a bag of talk to Lamochattee?"

"Jackson with many fighting men from the Seventeen Fires is on the Coosa."

He had not heard the news as the lively expression of his stern face evidenced. He said—

"Such a big talk should not wait in this path. Lamochattee will strike like an eagle again."

"Give him the talk at Tukabatchi if your white brother does not overtake him on the river."

He stepped aside and I passed. I could feel the back of my neck crawling; for I feared lest he had been playing a part and might strike me from behind. I did not look back, and after a dozen steps I ventured to breathe in relief. I had deceived the man; and once satisfied he was not following me, I withdrew from the path and slept till morning. Had I not met the Creek I would have arrived in Imukfa before Weatherford set forth for the lower town. And that meeting would have left Polly McGin without a friend in the Creek country.

In the morning I dined on squirrels and a pigeon and took my time in following the path. There was danger of being overtaken by men from Kusa, although they could not know I had worked deeper into the red country. But runners were ever coming and going, and all the Kusa men would be quick to name me and proclaim my flight from the white town.

Imukfa was one of seven villages scattered along the Talapoosa and its creeks, and if not for Polly McGin my venturing there would have been nothing short of madness.

It was after midday that I seated myself on a slight eminence of broken ground and surveyed the town. Children were playing, women were at work, but I did not see many men.

"The white man has hurt his feet?" asked a deep voice behind me.

Although vastly disturbed I betrayed no surprize. Nor did I turn my head.

"He has traveled long and is tired."

"He comes to find some one?" continued the voice.

"He seeks his friend Lamochattee, the Red Eagle."

"Lamochattee went down the river with the first light."

This was good news. I slowly rose and turned about. The man was along in years and the scars on his head and breast spoke of a brave warrior.

"After food and rest the white man will follow the Eagle," I said.

He fell in behind me as I walked on to the village. Women stared at me curiously. Children ran up to us. Several men eyed me sharply. But it was not unusual for white men to be in the Creek villages, and since the war came, Spanish agents were often there. I had passed almost to the public square before I saw Polly McGin. I would not have noticed her at first if not for her red hair; for she was dressed as an Indian girl. We came face to face near the council-house, and so great was her astonishment that she did not give any sign of recognition.

"We are strangers!" I hurriedly told her.

Her small face twisted convulsively. Then, without looking at me—but I could read bleak misery in her eyes — she whispered:

"God help you. God help us. Dancer and two of his kind are here!"

CHAPTER XII

WHAT HAPPENED AT IMUKFA

POLLY McGIN forgot her rôle of stranger and seized my arm and drew me into a cabin before I had recovered from my amazement. Then she was whispering:

"You must stay here. I must think. They came yesterday. They should have gone with Weatherford this morning. But they are here. If you can keep out of sight— Yet they'll soon know a white man has come—"

"Dancer here in Imukfa! I'll find him!"

She clutched my arm with both hands and fiercely whispered:

"It's death! It's cruel death if you show yourself. He killed Joel. Must he kill you?"

My head was filled with a storm of accumulated hate:

"Killed Joel in the night. He'll get no chance to kill me from behind. I've said I'll kill him for what he's done. I'll find him— Let go. Polly! I don't want to hurt you."

"No. You wouldn't hurt me. But by going out and finding that beast you'd kill me, or worse." And she loosened her grip.

Instead of starting my search I remained staring at her dully, and repeating:

"Kill you? Harm a hair of your small head? How can the death of that murderer hurt you? You wish him dead?"

"With all my heart and soul I wish him dead," she whispered, and again seized my arm. "But he's in high favor here. He has two of his kind with him. A Mexican he calls Nemesio. And one like himself, an American cut-throat."

I was trying to remember why the name of Nemesio was familiar and was slowly tracing back through memory to some stories I had heard at the Natchez landing, when she broke in:

"Instead of going with Weatherford, they stayed to throw dice. Nemesio suggested it."

"They do not have to stay here to gamble with dice," I mused.

Then I noticed the high color sweeping over her pale cheeks. I forgot my vengeance for the time and held her at arm's length and stared down into her flushed face, and demanded— "Well—do you talk?"

"I am a medicine-woman to the Creeks. None of them will harm me. I could have gone away anytime had I known where and how to go."

Still I did not understand. She slowly explained—

"I'm only an unprotected white girl to Dancer and his two friends."

"They would never dare! The Creeks would not allow it!"

"The Creeks are afraid of my medicine. They wish I would go to some other town. They say my medicine will protect me. If the white men trouble me and are hurt by my medicine the Creeks will say nothing, do nothing. If my medicine can not help me, then it is weak. And again the Creeks will say nothing, do nothing."

"You mean they will shake dice to see who gets you?"

"Nemesio proposed it. The American was willing to let the knife settle it."

"—— their miserable hides! And now you ask me to keep quiet and let them escape!"

"They serve Weatherford. Dancer has been here many times in the last ten years. If Weatherford were here he would not let them abuse me. But he'll do nothing to them for what happens while he is away. Nemesio has friends in Pensacola. The American has acted as spy and brought word of conditions at Fort Mimms. This morning I thought the three of them were going with Weatherford. They started down the river; then came back. Since then they have been in one of the houses drinking."

"See here, Polly. I've got to break my vow. I swore I'd hang Dancer. Now I must be content with simply killing him. Show me the cabin."

"Jeffry, don't!" she pleaded. "If you do that—if you could do that, the Creeks would surely kill you. Then I would indeed be alone in the world."

I laughed, although it would be a long time before I could laugh in merriment. She stared wildly, fearing, perhaps, I had lost my senses. I explained:

"The Creeks will kill me, once they learn I left the white town of Kusa. It's like one of the old Bible towns, where one is safe until he leaves it. I left."

"You've thrown your life away when you knew you were safe?" she piteously whispered.

"Good ——! Could I stick there while knowing you were somewhere in the Creek country, perhaps in danger?"

She stared intently into my frowning face and the color left her face and then was surging back like war-paint:

"No, you couldn't stay there," she gently agreed. "You're yourself and you had to leave."

There was no point to this that I could see; and I resumed:

"I'm here. Your great danger are the white men. It's best to find them quickly."

Then she broke down for a few minutes and sobbed:

"And you're not safe even if the white

men were not here. Why did you come? It's all so miserably hopeless!"

"None of that. Lift your head. Stick out that chin. What would Bully McGin say if he knew his daughter was showing weakness. Our one chance hinged on my reaching you. Jackson's army is on the Upper Coosa. If he smashes the Creeks, even your medicine wouldn't save you. They'd blame it for their defeat. And I took no foolish chances. I made sure Weatherford was gone before I entered the town. The men from Kusa will be hunting for me down the river. I wear the chief's wampum and am safe until word comes I ran from a white town. You're medicine. We'll strike north and try to reach friendly Creeks at Taladega. From there to Jackson's army will be easy work."

Before I had finished she was clinging to my arm, and her face was glorious with a new hope.

"That's a good talk, Jeffry. Sometime, when there's no misery around us, I'll talk to you about how you came to find me when your life was forfeited—"

"And shame me by so doing. You will not. As if I could have done anything else! To meet old Greenberry Spiller and have to tell him, 'Yes, I escaped from the Creeks. Polly McGin? Why she's still down in the Creek Nation somewhere.' That would be a fine talk!"

"Of course you had to come, Jeffry," she quickly agreed. "Now this is our plan. We'll leave to-night. Our great problem will be to keep clear of Dancer until dark. This is my cabin. No Creeks will enter it. You will stay here. The Creeks who saw you know you wear the chief's wampum—But the days and years and ages I've waited—waited, Jeffry— It's been worse than death."

I did not like these moments of weakness. They were new in her, and alarmed me.

"I tell you, Polly McGin, to hold up your head! Don't lose your grit. What you've suffered imagining things can't hurt you now. Of course you knew I'd come once I got the chance. Our big fight is between us and sundown."

She was transformed before I had finished. The small head came up and the small chin was very reminiscent of Bully McGin's belligerent underjaw.

"Watch from the window. I'll change my clothes," she curtly directed.

And I stood by the door, where I could look through the small hole without being seen, and in an exceedingly short time Polly McGin stood beside me in her breeches and short coat and the red sash about her waist. Even the rabbit-skin hat was on her red locks. In her two hands she held the long sheathed sword.

"I like you better that way," I told her. "But don't wear the hat till we are ready to start. It looks as if you had sung a travel song."

She tossed the hat aside; then suddenly unsheathed the sword and tilted her head.

"Hear it?" she whispered. "The Mexican always whistles that. The tune makes my flesh creep."

The whistler was drawing nearer and now I heard it plainly. Well might it sound sinister, but I explained nothing to her. I had heard it in Natchez, from men who had gone into New Mexico after wild horses. And they had picked it up from the Mexicans. It was the *deguello*,* or throat-cutting tune.

The whistling ceased. After a short pause we heard three men talking close to the cabin. The first words I heard were:

"It don't make no difference if he is a friend of Weatherford. If he's in the cabin we'll snake him out. He's where his betters should be."

"Weatherford's friend or not, it's bad for a man to step ahead of Nemesio," softly spoke a second voice and with scarcely a trace of accent.

Then came the shrill, whining voice I hated above all sounds. Dancer was advising:

"Be sly. Be cunning. Look at me. Mason of the Woods is dead. Wiley Harp, and his big brother before him, are dead. All killed— I'm still walking on my hind legs. So be sly. The girl can't run away. We must wait till we're sure Weatherford's at Tukabatchi. I've known him for years. Don't try any game on him. Go slow till we look this man over. If he's wearing the chief's wampum we must be careful. What we want is the woman. Not that I don't hanker to slice the scut's throat for going into that cabin ahead of us."

The first speaker cried:

"Dancer, you have your ways and I have mine. You've slunk through life. I've

* Santa Anna's bands played it at the Alamo for the "no-quarter" signal.

talked brash and crowded folks from my path. Yet I'm still alive. Weatherford ain't going to kick up any row, now he needs us more'n ever. Sartain not when he knows it won't undo what's done."

"I ain't thinking of the woman," whined Dancer. "She's medicine to the Injuns. If her medicine can't help her, they won't help her. She's no man's prisoner except the man's who takes her. But this strange white man? Mebbe he's a Spaniard from Pensacola. It'll be bad business to bother any of the chief's Spanish friends."

'IF HE'S a Spaniard I'll whisper in his ear," gently said Nemesio. "But we must have a look at our favorite."

They would soon be in range of the small window, but their approach was less evil than their talk. I glanced down at Polly and was reassured by the blazing fury of her small face. They came up near the door on the side where there was no window. As they halted she seized my long hair and pulled my head down and whispered:

"Forget your vow! Forget everything except the need of escaping tonight. Sometime, somewhere, you'll meet Dancer again. If I don't escape with you I must die."

There was a moment of silence outside. Then the door was violently kicked open. Dancer, with his high shoulder and tilted head, stood before me. On his right was a slim Mexican, with his short jacket and flaring trousers heavy with silver braid and dotted with silver disks. The man's eyes were as baleful as a swamp moccasin's. Behind Dancer towered a huge, uncouth American. The shaggy hair and bristling beard suggested a wild animal more than a human being. I was as I had fought at Fort Mimms, naked to the waist, and scratched and begrimed by my flight from Kusa. The moment the door flew open and Dancer's long yellow face appeared I had one of my two knives tentatively extended, the point on a line with the scrawny throat. For a count of three the murderer incredulously stared at me. Then with a snarling cry he was leaping backward and behind the American renegade.

Nemesio was puzzled, for he had never seen me before. He bowed low to Polly and then turned to Dancer and called out—

"You two have met before?"

Dancer, feeling quite secure behind the American cut-throat and satisfied I did not plan an immediate attack, shrilly cried—

"He's one I'd rather kill than any man alive!"

Nemesio twirled his long black mustaches, smiled a bit as he glanced at my knife, and stepped aside and lightly said:

"Well, why don't you kill him? He's a nuisance." And he softly whistled the *deguello*.

By this time some of the Creek men were gathering, curiously observing us. They saw Dancer shielding himself behind his big companion. They saw my naked knife. The medicine-woman had her long knife ready for a thrust. A middle-aged man stepped forward and said:

"The white men do not love this new white man. Let them use their eyes. Let them see he wears the wampum of Lamochattee."

Dancer's whining voice warned:

"The *miko* says he wears Weatherford's wampum. We'll have to go a bit slow, boys."

Nemesio's snaky eyes were on the girl. He seemed to have forgotten everything and every one else. The bewhiskered villain pushed him roughly aside and stood before the door and roared:

"Weatherford's wampum be ——! No —— Injun can tell me what I'll do, or won't do!" And he leaped forward to enter the doorway just as I stepped over the log-sill.

The impact of my fist under his chin could be heard at a considerable distance. The *miko* and his men clapped their hands to their mouths, and the Mexican leaped frantically to one side and squealed in amazement, as they beheld the huge carcass crumple to the ground and remain inert. The smack of the blow had sent Dancer plunging behind a group of Creeks.

"The white man has a medicine-hand!" cried a warrior.

The *miko* now recovered from his astonishment and muttered—

"This is bad."

"Tell those two white dogs to take this bad flesh away from the door of the medicine-woman," I replied.

The *miko* gravely replied:

"They will take it away. But this is bad. You wear Lamochattee's wampum and you strike Lamochattee's friend."

"He attacked me."

"It is for Lamochattee to punish those

who attack his friend. You will stay in the medicine-woman's cabin until a runner can bring a talk from Tukabatchi." Turning on Dancer he sternly continued: "You have been in our villages many times. You know our law. You will keep away from this cabin while the white man is in it."

"—— and ——!" screamed the Mexican, and showing his teeth in a terrible grimace. "He gets the woman by half-killing our friend!" To the *miko*, speaking in the Creek tongue, he argued:

"The Español Fire has warmed Lamochattee's hands many times. Your new guns come from the Pensacola Fire. Español gold has paid for the scalps you have taken. The Español Fire has given, given, given. It has asked nothing from the Creek Fire. Now a man from the Pensacola Fire comes and asks for a white woman and is told he can not have her. What Creek wants her? The Pensacola Fire will buy her."

"No Creek wants her," slowly answered the *miko*. "When Lamochattee sends an answer to my talk, our Español friend will wash all anger from his heart."

Nemesio bristled with anger and hotly cried:

"The Creeks do not want the woman. The Creeks will not give her to a friend. They say a talk will go to Lamochattee. The Español says a talk shall go to the Pensacola Fire. Then when you need more new guns and powder and lead you can ask the Americans for them."

This threat made a deep impression on the *miko* and his men. At this critical moment it was imperative that Weatherford maintain friendly relations with Spanish and English agents. I broke in, saying:

"This dog is a liar. There is not a word of truth in his bag of talk. He is from the Mexican Fire, and not from the Pensacola Fire. When he talks in Pensacola the women laugh. If he sends a talk to Pensacola, the Fire will say to the *miko* of Imukfa, 'Whip the bad flesh from your village.'" Then, observing that the big American was regaining his senses, I pointed to him and said. "Make that sick dog crawl away."

The *miko* listened carefully to my speech. He watched the American crawl one side on his hands and knees and then rise unsteadily to his feet. He lifted a hand for attention and silence and said:

"A swift runner starts now after Lamochattee. There is truth somewhere in the bag and we will shake it out. The *miko* and his Beloved Men will go to the council-house and talk about the medicine-woman." To his companions he said, "Let there be no fighting near this cabin, or in the village while your *miko* and the Beloved Men talk." Turning to me he commanded, "Go into the house and keep the door closed. You have made trouble in Imukfa by striking a friend of Lamochattee."

"The man attacked me," I replied. "A good friend of Lamochattee would not attack a man wearing a chief's wampum collar."

"There is truth in the bag. We will shake it out," was his reply; and, followed by his Beloved Men, he started for the council-house.

Polly and I entered the house and closed the door. Several warriors drew up on each side of the door. I expected the white men to withdraw, but they seated themselves on the ground opposite the door. The big American blasphemed terribly. He seemed unable to understand just what had happened to him. From the window I called to one of the warriors to make the men go away. He told me:

"Lamochattee's old friends walk where they will in the town. They will not enter the house."

Nemesio jeered:

"The friend of Weatherford is annoyed. Or perhaps he is afraid."

"——him! He hit me!" roared the American renegade. "I won't sleep till I do for him."

"No cutting in ahead of me, my friend," shrilly warned Dancer. "He's on my list. Keep off!"

"Git in my path and I'll break your long back," growled the renegade.

Nemesio, who had enjoyed this brief exchange, now snapped his fingers for silence, and reminded:

"The man without a shirt to cover his nakedness can't get away. What matters who kills him so long as he is dead? It's the woman who counts. One throw of the dice. High man takes her." He fished three dice from his pocket and exposed them in his palm and explained:

"SEVEN years ago these killed an American. It was at Chihuahua. My people caught Philip Nolan and eight of his men when I was a boy. They were held prisoners nearly seven years. Then it was

ordered that one must die. They threw these dice on a drum head to see which should die. All were white except black Cæsar, a slave. I saw the loser* die. I picked up the dice. They've brought bad luck to Americans ever since. Now we will cast for the girl."

"Not with them —— unlucky dice," growled the renegade. "I'd rather draw straws, or draw marked bullets from a hat."

"You're no longer an American, you big fool. The dice are as good for you as for me," impatiently said Nemesio.

Polly McGin pressed close to me and whispered:

"Such a thing can never be, Jeffry?"

"Never!" I whispered.

The American was roaring:

"I won't shake no dead men's dice. And I won't be cheated."

Dancer shrilly offered—

"Give me the man tightly bound and I'll not cast for the girl."

"There, big friend!" cried Nemesio. "That leaves it between you and me."

"Not with dead men's dice," stoutly objected the American.

"You two waste your talk. No one gets the girl till the man is out of the way," reminded Dancer.

"Bah! He ain't a handful. He hit me when I wasn't looking," said the American. "Next time I'll be watching. Once I git my hooks on him, he'll be tied up and handed over to you, Dancer. But it's queer you want him instead of the girl."

"It's an old, old reckoning that must be paid. There was a debt in Natchez years ago. When I git him under my knife the score's evened up."

"I can hate, but not as strong as you, old snake," said Nemesio admiringly. "You shall have your man. You speak with sense. It's no use to throw the dice till we have the man."

"I won't wait long. I'll kill him myself with my bare hands," warned the renegade.

"If you do that I'll cut your big throat from ear to ear," hissed Dancer. "Get some sense into your two heads. See here—the man can't get away. Throw the dice. I'll not take part. Settle about the girl; then help me with the man."

"Not dead men's dice," doggedly refused the renegade. "Make a mark on a bullet, Dancer. Put two in a hat. Shake out one for me, one for Nemesio. The marked bullet takes the girl."

This did not suit Nemesio:

"Slowly, slowly," he interposed. "I've been keen enough, but until the pretty one is bagged we must work together. The loser might not be quick to help the winner. Let's get the prize before drawing lots."

They became silent and I believed each wicked mind was busily scheming how to secure some advantage. Dancer, high-shouldered like a scavenger bird, was seated crosslegged and intent on tossing a knife into the air and making it fall point downward on a bit of bark. It was uncanny to observe how skillfully he could send the blade spinning upward and how closely it would land to the bark in its descent. The renegade was picking up sticks and breaking them into bits, his slow mind busy with horrible plans. Nemesio was rolling the dice in his hands and also evilly brooding. At last he jerked up his head and stared at Dancer for a bit. Then he exclaimed:

"Old Wicked, your father was a knife, your mother was a dagger." And he commenced whistling the *deguello*. The ferocious tune affected Dancer strongly, and he ceased playing with the knife to lift his head and stare at the cabin.

"If those —— Injuns don't hurry up I'm going to bust loose!" cried the renegade.

Dancer stared at me, his head twisted to one side. I glared back, giving him hate for hate. He broke the silence by calling out—

"Why did you come here, big fool?"

"To kill you, murderer."

"When you kill me you kill the girl," he warned.

Polly pulled me from the window and whispered:

"How much can one endure? Won't this ever end?"

"Their talk can't hurt us," I soothed. "They think only evil, and they can talk only evil. And we're winning thus far. The hours are passing. Night will give us our chance."

"They are so terrible. So inhuman," she was murmuring when the American loudly shouted:

"Here come the Injuns! We'll soon have two bullets in a hat!"

As I gained the little window the *miko* and his advisers filed around the corner of the house and halted before the door

* Ephraim Blackburn.

Then three white men came to their feet, glaring expectantly. The *miko* began:

"The white woman is bad medicine. We do not want her."

Nemesio leaped halfway to the door. A warrior blocked his path. The American advanced, and likewise was halted. The *miko* sternly announced:

"There is more talk in our bag. It is this: Take the woman if you want her. She is bad medicine and will bring much trouble to the man who puts a hand on her." Nemesio offended the Creek etiquette by laughing derisively. The *miko* flashed him a savage glance and continued, "Take the woman and the trouble she will bring you. But if you take her you must carry her away from this town, so trouble will not fall on us."

"Stand on the other side of the door when they come in," I whispered to Polly McGin.

Nemesio impatiently demanded:

"Is all the talk shaken out of the bag?"

The *miko* replied:

"We find a few words left. They say you must not touch the man who wears Lamochattee's wampum when you take the girl. You can ask him to put the girl out the door."

For nearly a minute there was silence. Then the big American fell to cursing and the Mexican to spluttering oaths. Dancer sheathed his knife and hunched his head low on his shoulder and shrilly remarked:

"A string is hitched to your gift, my friends. We waste time fretting. We must get Weatherford to remove his collar from the man's neck. That will be as soon as he can send back a runner."

The *miko* sternly insisted:

"You have heard the talk found in the bag in our council-house. Let it stick in your heads. By another sun a runner will come with a talk from Lamochattee."

As he turned to leave I called out from the window—

"It is bad for the friend of Lamochatee to be kept a prisoner in this house."

He halted and thought for a moment; then told me:

"Walk. It will be very bad if you try to leave the village."

He led his advisers away. Our three enemies, voicing terrible oaths, also retired. Three Creek men loitered near the house to see that the *miko's* orders were carried out and no attack was made on me. I opened the door and sat on the log threshold. Polly crouched beside me and murmured:

"Tell me all the chief said that made those evil ones so angry."

I gave her the gist of the talk, and she became quite radiant and rejoiced:

"Then we have until to-morrow. By morning we can be far away."

I did not wish to paint our situation too brutally, yet I could not deceive her completely.

"If the three villains know we have left the village they will try to follow us. If we succeed in getting away from this village we must be very cunning."

"If we succeed? Why, Jeffry, there's no 'if' about it. You've said your life is forfeited, once they learn you ran away from the white town."

A feeling of helplessness assailed me. Whichever way we turned we seemed to be facing an insurmountable barrier. My wampum collar would protect me only until word came from Weatherford, when I was lawful game for any man's knife. To work clear of the black mood I rose and said:

"Come. We'll walk about the village. Give me your sword."

"No. Here's another knife. Is it wise to leave the cabin when it will soon be dark?" As she spoke she secured a knife hanging from a peg inside the door and I thrust it into my belt, making a knife on each side.

"We'll walk through the town. Joel always said to be afraid of nothing that walks on legs so long as it can be seen."

"They're staying in a cabin back of the warrior's big house." And she nodded toward the south side of the village.

But Joel's words were in my mind and had suggested a new move, one which should free my small friend from all danger. I said—

"We'll look them up."

Now she was alarmed; not because of fear for herself, but for me.

"It'll never do, Jeffry," she begged. "If you fight they will kill you."

I DID not believe it. I explained how I would surprize them and eliminate the odds before they could start fighting. That would leave but one of us in danger; and the wampum would continue protecting me until Weatherford's message was

received. The more I thought about it and the more I argued with her, the more I believed in the simplicity of my plan. A sudden attack, two knives working, and no bullets would be put in a hat, no dead man's dice would be cast.

But Polly would not listen to reason. She clung to me. She refused to accompany me. She begged me to give up what she called a mad scheme. She insisted:

"You can't serve me that way, Jeffry. You can't help me by getting yourself killed, even if you kill the beasts before dying. If you leave me alone I'll wish I were dead, Jeffry. There's only one way to serve me. Live! Get me away from this terrible country! Get me back to Kentucky!"

I surrendered.

"Then we'll begin planning an escape now. We'll wander to the up-stream edge of the village and look for canoes."

Thereupon she was Polly McGin of the swaggering days, and she walked under my arm and pressed close to my side as she had so often walked with her father. We passed several groups of warriors, waiting word from Weatherford as to where they should strike their next blow, and wondering when more powder would arrive from Pensacola. These were quick to notice the girl's change back to her boy's dress; and they gave us a wide path, not out of fear of the sword, nor from respect or fear of me, but because they believed she was medicine. There was both fear and hate in their lowered glances at her flaming head. And they stared furtively and avoided her bold gaze as, with her head up, she stared at them.

Boys and girls scurried frantically between the houses as we approached, and anxious mothers called sharply for their children not to look at the witch-woman. Our course took us north of the public-square and clear of the Warriors' House. I still brooded over my plan to attack the trio by surprize. But the red head below my shoulder was very wise. As if reading my thoughts she began explaining to me how we would be in flight within a few hours, and reminding that no word could come from Tukabatchi until the morrow.

Near the north limit of the village a score of warriors filed across our path. They came from the public square. Leading them with dancing steps was a medicine-man, one of the lesser prophets. He wore a feathered head-dress and his face was painted black, and he was carrying his medicine-stick. Neither he, nor any of the fighting-men appeared to see us, although they passed within a few feet of us. The last man in the line had lagged a little behind the others. I accosted him, asking—

"Where do the men of my friend, Lamochattee, go?"

"To take a red war club against the white Creeks at Taladega," he replied.

When our way was clear I told Polly:

"Friendly Creeks are at Taladega. They may be killed if General Jackson doesn't know their danger in time to send help. We will carry the news. We will travel up the river and strike across to Taladega. These men are going afoot."

"Anything, anywhere," she whispered; and we followed the file of men until satisfied they did not propose traveling north by water. Then to give belief we were strolling aimlessly, we swung back toward the public-square. Children vanished like magic before our approach. Suddenly Polly halted and her eyes grew wide with fear. We were hearing the Mexican shrilly whistling the *deguello*.

"They are carousing. Whistling can't hurt you," I told her.

"It's the black heart of the whistler I fear," she murmured. "It's the evil in the man that frightens me. I would be afraid even if he were in a stout cage. I've felt the same in passing a dead snake. Let's turn back and look for canoes."

So we shifted our course to the north again, walking idly. We came to the last of the houses on the river and beheld a small dugout and several canoes drawn up on the bank. And I wished it were dusk that we might keep on. The same thought was in Polly's mind. She whispered:

"Canoes waiting for us. If it were only dark!"

"Don't stare too openly at them," I warned, and turned my own gaze to soft clouds coming in from the east. "The night promises to be overcast."

I had barely spoken when something crashed against the back of my head and I was flat on my face, overcome by a benumbing, sickening sensation. I heard Polly's shrill cry, the deep voice of the big American, and Nemesio was shouting:

"You mustn't finish him here, Dancer!"

I squirmed about and tried to rise. A period of seconds seemed an endless stretch of time. My faculties were confused, although I heard the slithering of metal against metal. I managed to turn on my side, and secured my first glimpse of the enemy. Polly was standing over me, holding the three men at bay with lightning flashes of the long sword. Near at hand was the fagot of firewood which had felled me.

Dancer was panting with his desire to kill me. The big American was shouting oaths and sweeping a cudgel before him to disarm the girl. Nemesio was holding Dancer back and cursing him in Spanish for his murderous impatience. The American tried to work around in a circle so the girl's back would be toward the two men. She stepped astride of me and bent far forward and thrust. A red seam instantaneously appeared on the bare arm of the American. With a yell he jumped back and hurled the cudgel at the girl. She ducked it, and Nemesio screamed:

"Big fool! You'd kill my woman!"

"Your woman! ——!" roared the American, drawing a long butcher knife.

All this had happened in a fraction of a minute. Dancer shook off Nemesio's hand and darted forward. I picked up the fagot, and, half-rising, hurled it. It landed in the long yellow face. Then I was on my feet, my head clear of all confusion; and I charged the enemy with a knife in each hand. The American was between me and Dancer. I saw Nemesio circling around to attack the girl. I would have halted but she encouraged:

"Lick your man, Jeffry! I'll hold this one!"

There was no choice. As the girl began keeping the Mexican busy behind me, the big renegade was about to close in. Dancer was crawling away, but soon would be back to use his knife. My opponent's knife was wet with the blood flowing from his arm. I heard Nemesio scream—

"You cursed cat!"

Polly McGin laughed. That laugh, so all-revealing of the girl's desire to die rather than be touched by the monster, spurred me on to finish with the renegade and leap to her assistance as much as a piteous cry for help could have done. I hurled the knife in my left hand. It was an awkward, futile cast, yet it sufficed to make the renegade dodge violently. And in that moment I sprang in and secured a grip on his right wrist. He frantically endeavored to secure a like hold on my knife-arm, while I endeavored to stretch his right above his head to bring us close enough for a thrust. With a fierce, sudden yank he pulled me forward and at the same time chanced a leap forward and his fingers clamped around my wrist and he was butting his shaggy head into my face. We went down, I underneath, and I caught a glimpse of Polly's slim figure crouching low and fending off Nemesio, who was fending off the long blade with his knife.

"Hold him! I'm coming!" screamed Dancer.

I was flat on my back, my left hand holding the renegade's right extended at full length. His left hand held my right in a similar position. I believed I could hear Dancer panting as he drew near. My adversary tried to bang his forehead into my face and I twisted my head. For a second I saw Polly McGin backing rapidly in my direction and risking to glance toward me and the renegade. The shaggy head pounded the side of my head. Then the beast tried to bite me. Just as I saw I could not escape the yellow teeth the parted jaws flew open wider, and he was sounding a yell and was convulsively flopping to my left and had loosened his hold on my wrist.

INSTANTLY seizing the opportunity, I struck. With a grunt and another flop he quit the battle and all earthly evil. When I threw the huge bulk clear I beheld Dancer running rapidly between two houses while a dozen Creeks were rapidly bearing down on us. In the next second I beheld Polly McGin breathing heavily as she watched Nemesio race for the village.

The Creeks came up and stared in awe and admiration at the flush-faced girl. The *miko* confronted me and accused:

"You have broken the peace of Imukfa. You have killed a friend of Lamochattee."

"I have killed bad flesh who is the friend of no man," I replied. "There is a hurt on the back of my head where club hit me and knocked me down. It was thrown from behind. A *miko* said no one should hurt the man who wears the wampum of Lamochattee. This dead man and his two friends crept up behind me and tried to kill me.

What would Lamochattee say if he got a talk, telling about man killed in Imukfa while wearing a chief's wampum?"

Two of the Beloved Men stepped beside the chief and talked in whispers. When they finished he glanced at Polly McGin, who was now under my arm, breathing spasmodically from exhaustion and excitement. Quickly shifting his gaze to avoid her staring blue eyes he told me:

"There were four white men with red hearts in Imukfa. All were friends of Lamochattee and came here to help him. They would have lived together like brothers if a medicine-woman had not come to Imukfa. The woman sent a black cloud over their souls. They fight and kill each other. The woman is an evil spirit. She sent brother against brother. She must leave Imukfa."

I pressed my arm over Polly's shoulders at this unexpected good news. "Give us some food and we will go," I told the *miko*.

"Your soul is in a black cloud. You do not know the words in your mouth. You wear Lamochattee's wampum. You will be saved. The woman will go alone."

"What are they talking about?" asked Polly.

I did not answer her, but told the *miko*:

"There will be a black cloud over all this town of Imukfa if any man touches the woman to drive her away. Lamochattee sent her here. She is a friend of Hillis Hadjo—Francis the Prophet. She plans to go after another sleep. Let no man try to hurry her."

The *miko's* eyes flashed with anger, but after a glance at the girl he lowered his head and spoke under his breath to the two Beloved Men. The three counseled together briefly; then the *miko* said:

"After one sleep she must go. Food will be placed at the door of her house before the sun goes away. The new sun must find her gone. If she is in Imukfa in the morning we will call in a powerful shaman from the nearest town to make her soul turn black."

Two of the Indians picked up the dead renegade and we all started for the village. None of the Creeks would walk on my right side, as that would bring them next to Polly. I called out to the *miko*:

"What will be done with the two men who attacked me?"

"They are friends of Lamochattee. They are under a black spell. The medicine-woman filled their heads with madness."

Polly and I did not attempt conversation until we were back in the cabin. We had barely closed the door behind us before I heard a slight noise. Glancing from a window, I saw a woman running away. She had left two kettles at the door. I brought them inside. One was filled with water, and the other held meat, corn and beans. Polly dropped weakly on a couch of robes and stared at me hopelessly.

"You saved my life, Polly McGin, when you risked being disarmed as you turned to prick that beast."

"I was helpless if he mastered you, Jeffry. And there was the other man, creeping up like a snake," she sighed.

"I saw a red patch on the Mexican's cheek where you reached him," I added.

"He is terrible!" she hoarsely murmured. "Life is terrible—down here. Oh, Jeffry, Jeffry! If my father could have been there but for a minute—" She broke off and buried her face in her arms and sobbed convulsively.

I waited until she was quiet; and then told her:

"If your father had been there the three men would have kept away. There can never be another Bully McGin."

Lifting her head and wiping away the tears she assured me:

"None could have done better than you did, Jeffry. If they hadn't struck you down from behind they never would have attacked. But what will happen next?"

"We will run for it to-night as already planned," I promptly declared.

She sprang to her feet and placed both hands on my shoulders and stared searchingly into my face.

"Do you really believe we can get clear of this place?" she earnestly asked. "Do you believe we have a chance if we do get clear?"

She was capable of hearing the truth.

"God knows, Polly! But we must try it. We owe that to your father and Joel. To do our best. Life or death, we'll go together to-night.

She clapped her hands softly and exclaimed:

"Good! Together. Hand in hand. Back to back if it comes to fighting. That will be good. I forgot for a bit. Now I've had my cry I'll be Bully McGin's girl. I'll never shame my father."

I marvelled more and more at the sturdiness of her spirit. She possessed all the indomitable spirit of her swaggering father, although scarcely more than a handful of a woman. She was to be desired because of herself, aside from her unconquerable will. She was thoroughly feminine, but behind the long sword, the same that had pricked me so neatly on our first meeting, she could be as venomous as the sting of death. As I stared at her I vaguely sensed I was beholding an Idea instead of sex. I was gazing on the unquenchable spirit of all frontiers.

"Why do you look at me like that, Jeffry?" she diffidently asked.

"Because I love you more than I could ever tell," I heard myself saying. "You are America. I'm sheer dumbfounded, Polly. I've always thought of men when I thought of America. Now I find it's women."

"You talk strangely, Jeffry," she whispered. "That blow on your head—"

"No clout over the head would ever make me babble like this. Lie down and rest."

"No. You lie down and rest."

I shook my head stubbornly. If there were no evil anywhere in the world I could not have relaxed; there was so much to think about, to wonder at, to marvel over. So much I must never betray.

"Sleep if you can," I commanded. "It will soon be time." And I went outside and seated myself with my back against the logs.

As one under a spell I remained there, trying to re-arrange my views of life when I should have been trying to plan our flight. It was near sundown before I managed to take command of my thoughts and direct them toward solving our predicament. I remembered I had not eaten. I reached inside the door and secured a piece of meat from the kettle. I was glad to note that Polly was sleeping. There came shouts from the river and I bolted my meat and prepared for the climax, whatever it might be. I was soon reassured by hearing a woman tell another that several barrels of powder had arrived from Pensacola.

The sun was not yet down but I believed it might be a good time to run away. I knew the village would be pouring to the river bank south of the town. Before I could more than consider the advantages of immediate flight a line of warriors, led by one of their medicine-men, came into view. The men were carrying several small kegs and they were depositing them in the next cabin but one, and there was great rejoicing.

Polly McGin was bending over me, aroused by the noise. She whispered—

"What is it?"

"They're storing powder in the second cabin on our left. It just arrived from Pensacola."

She crouched behind me and rested a hand on my shoulder. The red sun was poised on the skyline. A long drawn-out cry sounded northwest of the village. A cry sounded down the river. I gave them no thought. The first was probably a successful hunter returning. The second a bit of rejoicing because of the newly arrived gunpowder.

The hand on my shoulder pressed hard and the girl was saying:

"We must be ready, Jeffry. Together," I told her.

"It's early yet. We can do nothing till the sun sinks."

"It is time to be ready. We can't wait long for the sun. You heard the cries?"

Even as she put the query the cries were repeated.

"A hunter calling. A man celebrating the powder from Pensacola."

She rose and stepped back and I heard the sword clatter as she took it down from the peg.

"You have your knives?"

"In my belt. But calm yourself. Be patient for another hour."

"Those two men calling mean evil for us, Jeffry. Here is the kettle right behind you."

FROM behind the house between our cabin and where they had stored the gun-powder a voice cried in Spanish—

"We'll soon know."

"The man who whistles!" whispered Polly.

The cry on the river rapidly grew louder, as did the shouting of the man out in the broken ground in the direction I was facing. Creek warriors began passing our cabin and were halting at regular intervals. I called out to a man near by and asked—

"What is being said on the river?"

"A runner comes back from Tukabatchi."

This did not interest me. The runner who might arrive on the morrow was the man I wished to avoid.

"He says he brings word from Lamochattee about a man wearing a chief's wampum," added the Creek.

"He hasn't had time," I stupidly insisted as I turned to explain to Polly the unexpected menace now entering the village. In my consternation I did not think to ask why she had changed to her Indian clothes and was wearing a blanket over her head.

"I don't understand it," I told her. "The runner sent to Weatherford is returning. He shouldn't be back this early. The Creek man said he brings some word about me. Hand me the kettle."

Keeping back from the door, she whispered:

"Too late. They're surrounding the cabin. There's a fire blazing behind the cabin. There is one on the right of us!"

I frantically gazed about:

"They plan to have enough light," I groaned. "They light one on our left. We're hemmed in and this spot will be light as day after the sun's gone."

The cry in the open ground before me sounded again, this time very near. It was the greeting-cry usually given outside a red village.

Polly slipped through the door, her head and shoulders covered by the robe. She glanced up and down the openings on both sides of our cabin—

"Be ready to run if we get the chance," she whispered.

I was ready, but there was no chance. Several men came running from the open country, and one could see they were weary from long and continuous travel. I believed all was lost as in the first of the runners I recognized the *miko* from the new village beside ancient Kusa.

The Creeks stationed before the cabin pressed forward to give him greeting. He explained—

"We come to find the man who killed Long Claw of the Wild-Cat People Clan."

Fierce howls and yells greeted this intelligence, Imukfa's first news of Long Claw's death. On my left a mixed body of men and women were approaching, shouting terribly. I heard a shrill voice scream:

"By——! We've got him now, Nemesio!"

And stitching the shouts and yells together was the evil tune of the *deguello*.

I got to my feet to die fighting. Over my shoulder I called out to the girl:

"When they get at me, try to get through the window and run for it. I'll follow you."

She did not reply and I had no time to talk further, for Nemesio was now pointing at me and demanding of Imukfa's *miko:*

"Say the word! Weatherford sends a talk. Let the people know what kind of a man this is."

The *miko* raised his hand for silence. Then dramatically pointing at me he loudly announced:

"A man who met this man coming to Imukfa overtook Lamochattee down the river. Lamochattee sends a runner to say this man is protected by a chief's wampum only so long as he remained in the white town of Kusa. He can not wear the wampum now he has left Kusa."

Men and women exulted and Dancer threw up his hand and a knife quivered in a log close to my head. In ducking it I sat down in the doorway and my hand rested on the long sword.

"Polly! Polly McGin!" I fiercely cried, but she did not answer and the cabin was empty.

As I rose to my feet, holding the sword, the Imukfa *miko* further explained:

"This man is bad flesh. Lamochattee says the wampum must be taken from his neck."

Polly McGin had vanished, disguised by blanket and her red clothes. Once in the hands of the Imukfa Creeks, or in the power of the Mexican and Dancer, I was worse than dead. With a leap I was ten feet from the cabin. The Creeks nearest prepared to grapple with me. Another leap sidewise and I was before the *miko* from the Coosa. Seizing his limp hand I placed it on my shoulder and with my other hand I tore off the wampum collar. Then I proclaimed:

"I am the prisoner of this *miko*. Lamochattee said I should be the prisoner of the first man to catch me. This is the first man to have his hand on my shoulder."

With a shrill howl Dancer ran toward me but was caught around the waist by a Coosa warrior and hurled back. The Coosa *miko* lifted a hand and announced:

"This man was Lamochattee's prisoner. At Fort Mimms he put the wampum around his neck and sent him to Kusa. Lamochattee told the white man he would be the prisoner of the man who caught him, did he leave the white town. This is the law of the Creeks. He is my prisoner."

Imukfa Creeks now laid hands on Dancer and Nemesio, and their *miko* shouted:

"My brother has spoken. It is good. Will my brother say what he will do with his prisoner? He has made trouble in Imukfa. Many would be glad to see him die."

My captor replied:

"Many on the Coosa would see him die. We will take him there." Then to me, "Do you know of Long Claw's death?"

"I killed him," I replied, and lost nothing in their esteem for claiming the credit. "I killed the dogs sent after me." As I spoke I was glaring about for a glimpse of Polly McGin.

Now the Mexican began shouting, "Where is the medicine-woman? Where is the woman who dresses like a white boy and has red hair?"

"He has her long sword!" yelled Dancer.

The Imukfa *miko* came and stood before me and quietly said:

"If you were my prisoner I would take four days sending you into the black earth. You are bad flesh. Where is the medicine-woman?"

"She is medicine. She turned into a bird and flew away."

Nemesio, deprived of his knife, was allowed to approach me.

"She's hiding in this village. I will find her," he told me. And he would have struck me in the face had I not forestalled the blow by knocking him headlong and insensible.

My captor approved of this, and remarked:

"It is bad to strike another man's prisoner. The Español has been living among wild men."

Dancer was furious to think I was escaping his knife. Inarticulate with rage, he kept out of range of my fist and attempted to speak and made only animal sounds. I told him:

"I have made a vow to hang you, Dancer. Remember, you will die in a noose."

My captor, standing behind me, whispered over my shoulder:

"You did well to come to me. There was a little boy, who would have been lost in the water. He is well and plays with his sisters. His father has run hard to catch the man who saved him. That man must die, but he shall be quick in dying. The stroke of an ax, or the stab of a knife."

This was the greatest boon I could have asked, but so terrible was my concern over lost Polly McGin that I gladly would have surrendered myself even to Dancer, or to Nemesio, to know no harm had, or would, come to her.

Some of the Creeks began shouting that the visitors from the Coosa repair to the public square and enjoy a feast. Others took up the cry and the Coosa men were weary and not averse to relaxation and much meat. The Imukfa *miko* came to walk with the Coosa *miko*, who was awkwardly carrying the girl's long sword.

The Imukfa man scowled at the weapon and said:

"That is bad medicine. Throw it into the river. The woman who carried it is a witch. She was in a cabin—now she is gone."

"It is a sharp long knife. I know a red medicine which will make the white medicine very weak."

The thin scream of a woman rose above the talk of warriors, followed by shrill cries of several women. The scream was repeated several times. The crowd of people seemed stupid at first, but men began running frantically by the time I and those about me managed to understand.

"There is a fire! There is a fire!" was what the woman was screaming.

It was dark enough for a rosy glow to show a short distance behind the house Polly McGin had stayed in.

"THE powder from the Pensacola Fire!" roared the Imukfa *miko*. "Bring out the kegs of powder!"

There was a wild surge of some of the warriors for the powder-house. There was a wilder and a more frenzied scramble of the crowd to get away from the building, which was ablaze on the back end. I had not been bound, and in the resulting confusion I could have run away. I had said "together" in planning flight with Polly McGin. I had no desire, no thought of trying to escape alone.

The Creeks running to rescue the powder suddenly halted and darted among the buildings. There came a sharp explosion followed by a rumbling, jarring detonation that filled the heavens with burning brands. Men nearest the force of the explosion went down like sticks of wood. My captor was

knocked against me by the mad scrambling of the crowd. I heard the long sword clatter at my feet and picked it up. After the flare of light the darkness seemed to be that of black velvet. A hand clutched mine. I thought it some terrified child.

I ran to escape being trampled under foot. By degrees I sensed the hand clinging to mine was trying to pull me from the direction the terrified people were taking.

"Jeffry!" faintly came a voice that made the dark night more beautiful than the rarest sunrise.

I scooped her up and threw her over my shoulder. She had been trying to guide me to where we had visited the canoes. I reached them as the panic subsided. Leaders were shouting for the men and women to throw water on the houses still standing, and were assuring the people there would be no more explosion.

We put a canoe into the water and started upstream just as men began shouting to hunt for the white man. As we quietly worked against the current a man on the bank close by shouted:

"The white man ran away from the *mikol* He belongs to the man who catches him."

But they had no idea what direction I had taken. We worked up the river until the east grew light. Then we cunningly concealed the dugout and found a thicket half a mile back from the stream where we would dare to sleep. And I secured my first sight of Polly McGin. The red locks were burned short and her face was black from the dirt and smoke.

"Poor child!" I commiserated. "You've had a hard time of it."

"Jeffry, one while I thought I never could get the fire started. Then I was afraid the powder would blow me to pieces before I could reach you. And then you'd never know what really happened to little Polly McGin."

"You set that fire?" I gasped.

"It was the only way when I saw the Indians surrounding us at the cabin and heard them crying that Weatherford's runner had come. It was simple. No one paid any attention. I was covered by the blanket and wearing an Indian girl's skirt and leggings and moccasins. But it was dreadful to work my way back and I believed they would kill you before the fire caused confusion. I prayed and prayed for the powder to hurry up and explode—And now we're together, for death or life."

"For life, Polly McGin. Your medicine has pulled us through."

CHAPTER XIII

THE MEDICINE OF POLLY McGIN

THE morning brought a small band of Creeks near our thicket and we remained all day in hiding. They approached near enough for me to hear the leader say we could not have gone so far east of the river. He ordered the men back to their canoes to scout the other bank and despatched a runner to Choloco Litabixee — horse's flat foot — or Horseshoe Bend, as the whites call it. Not until evening did we risk crossing the river and strike for the head of Imukfa Creek. We had been twenty-four hours without food and we must wait until in the hilly country at the head of the creek before we could seek food and rest. We crossed the upper Imukfa early in the morning, and before sunrise we were in the hills.

Polly McGin wanted to dance and sing, so marvelous had been our deliverance. She believed the Creeks were confining their hunt along waterways. I suddenly entered a new and a very disturbing mental experience. I caught myself looking behind me. Not once and casually, but at frequent intervals, accompanied by the feeling I was being followed stealthily. We were snugly concealed and there were no signs of our enemies, and yet I persisted in glancing backward. It mattered not in which direction I might be facing. If my back was to the north, then the pull came from the north. At last Polly noticed my behavior.

"Why do you keep jerking your head about, Jeffry?" she whispered.

"I feel we are being followed."

"It can't be. We've been careful. They are searching widely, but not here."

"My nerves are bad. You stay here in this thicket near these oaks. I'll try for a turkey."

I gave her the sword and one of my knives and saw to it all traces of her entering the bushes were eliminated. I entered the oaks and, coming to a southern slope, I climbed a tree and looked to the south. The sun was now up and its rays touched on something at the edge of a hickory growth a quarter of a mile away that glittered and gleamed most brightly. Then it was gone.

But search as I would I could see no moving figure. Despite this disturbing phenomenon I had to consider my search for food. I entered a burned-over area, grown up to bushes, and was elated at hearing the *gobble* of a turkey. I forgot my nervous impulse to watch my back-track. The *gobble-gobble* was approaching me and I remained motionless, with knife half raised. The bird, a beautiful cock, came into sight within a dozen feet of me and was an easy target for my knife. As I started forward to dress my game there recurred the sinister prompting to look behind me. Now I understood how poor Joel had been tormented by the same nerve-racking suggestions. I did pause and glance back. Then I dressed the bird, taking care to cast dirt on the feathers so they would not be blown about. Now with food before me I was tantalized by the desire to risk a small fire and broil the meat and to surprize Polly.

I believe I would have succumbed to the temptation if not suddenly assailed by the conviction that I was being watched. I believed I even knew the point where the hidden spy was located. Making a pretense of gathering dry sticks I passed behind a tree and dropped to the ground and searched the growth to the south through a thin screen of ferns. A flash and a glitter rewarded my efforts. It was the same as I had seen from the tree only now it was very close. I waited and saw the tops of the bushes gently agitated. Then a brown hand appeared and the sleeve of a jacket decorated with silver buttons. It was a button which reflected the sun-rays. I almost fancied I could hear him humming the *deguello*. However, Nemesio was to be preferred to a Creek spy. Gently moving back I began a circling movement.

By the time I had reached a position abreast of his hiding-place and was working in toward it, Nemesio grew suspicious, or impatient. I was over-long gathering my fuel. I detected motion in the tops of the bushes as he commenced to advance. Moving on all fours and squirming flat on my stomach at times, I turned parallel to his course. He had erred in his woodcraft. Instead of passing between clumps of bushes, he had worked into one. He could not retreat more noiselessly than he could go ahead. I was moving through the leafy tunnel formed by the overhanging boughs of his and an adjoining clump of ground-growth. I had a smooth path, while he was poorly situated. I was within five feet of him and could glimpse one of his slashed trouser legs between the bare stems of the bushes.

The foliage quite effectually concealed the upper part of his person. What impelled the utmost caution was the butt of a rifle occasionally showing beside his foot. He would take a step forward and make a bit of a noise, and would become motionless. Then, impatient, he would renew his advance. We were both making for the opening where I had left the bird. He stepped clear of the bushes and I halted in the mouth of my tunnel. He stood in full view and within a few feet of me. He held his gun ready to shoot, and I feared my fixed gaze would cause him to glance down behind him and discover me.

And as I watched him, he did seem to sense my proximity. He moved his feet uneasily and suspiciously glanced about. But he did not look at the ground. Suddenly he came to some decision and walked toward the turkey. Resting my weight on my hands I drew myself from cover and came to my feet and took a long step after him. Some animal sense warned him, and with a muttered exclamation he whirled about just as I leaped. My arm warded off the gun-barrel as he pulled the trigger, and the sound of the wild shot was so loud it seemed as if it might carry even to Imukfa.

"Dancer! Come to me! Help!" he screamed before I could smash my fist into his mouth. We grappled and tripped over the gun and went down, and he had pulled his knife by the time we hit the ground. Then we were at it like wild beasts. He was quicker than I, and better at knife-play. I was much stronger. He fought with the snarling fury of a wild-cat, his very desperation interfering with his skill. It was to my advantage when we rolled over and crashed into the bushes, and he was less free to use his nimble cunning. Each of us fought savagely for the mastery. It was the thought of Polly McGin's being hounded by such as he, and the thought of Dancer perhaps even now stumbling upon her hiding-place, that gave me a strength which even his feral agility could not withstand.

Panting a bit, I jumped into the opening and snatched up the gun and then regained the silent, gaily-clad figure and secured the powder-horn and bullet pouch. Nor

did I move from my kneeling position until I had the rifle loaded. Picking up the turkey, I struck out in a direct course for Polly's thicket. When I entered the thicket I found the point of the long sword within an inch of my face. Behind it was the terrified face of the girl.

"The gun? Who fired it? Oh, Jeffry, I was afraid! Afraid they'd got you!"

"Come!" I whispered. "The gun belonged to Nemesio. He's through." I glanced up at the blue sky. Already a scavenger was winging toward the opening.

"The Creeks are sure to see the buzzards. We must travel farther and hide more securely before we can eat."

WE DID not risk a halt to half broil the turkey until that night. In three days we traveled more than seventy miles. We moved due north, as it was my plan to strike the Coosa near the old Cherokee village of Turkey Town. Our course took us twenty miles to the east of Taladega, and fifteen miles east of Talassehatchie. Nor did I dare risk shifting our flight to the west where Jackson's little army was supposed to be on the Coosa.

Polly kept up by will power, and every time I would hazard a short resting spell she would insist:

"Go on! Go on!"

And there were times when I believed the passing bands of Creeks would discover us. Small parties of them were hurrying west to the Coosa and southwest to carry reports to Imukfa and the other Talapoosa towns. Doubtless there were few, if any of these, who knew about our escape. Our exertions, or good luck or the medicine of Polly McGin finally permitted me to drop on the river bank and announce:

"This is the Upper Coosa. Now we can rest."

"Cross over!" she insisted. Once on the opposite bank she continued, "Go on! Go on! Time to eat and sleep when we reach a safe place."

A few miles back from the river we slept. But not long, for she shook me awake and insisted we continue traveling. That very day we started through the mountains and passed the night beside the rough road General Jackson had made in leading his little army down to the Coosa. Now we could have taken our journey by easy stages, had not Polly borrowed my trick of glancing back and suspecting our foes were about to overtake us. I could not make her believe that the hostile Creeks would not venture so far north. Even when we reached the Tennessee she was impatient to cross. Not until we had made the crossing did she relax. She surveyed me carefully and said:

"First place we come to you must get a shirt or a coat. You're the color of a savage."

Each time I had bent over a quiet pool I had seen a stranger staring up at me—a disheveled creature, naked to the waist, tanned and burned by the sun, and lacerated by traveling through briars and bushes. Nor was Polly McGin as spic and span in appearance as in the Louisville days. It was not until we reached Huntsville, beautifully situated at the foot of a mountain slope, did I secure an undershirt and a hunting shirt and shaved the bristling beard from my lean face. When I went to her she clapped her hands and cried:

"Jeffry, you're almost good looking. Now I won't be ashamed of you when we reach Nashville."

"A squad of soldiers and some empty carts start for Nashville next week. You'll be as safe as if you were in Louisville."

She stared at me blankly; then asked:

"You're going back to the fighting, Jeffry?"

"You've heard the men tell the trouble General Jackson is having. I'm Tennessee born. Fort Mimms hasn't been paid for. And there's Dancer and my vow."

She glanced down at her moccasins and after a bit of silence asked:

"Is there anything in particular you want to say, Jeffry?"

"Why, yes. I love you more than you'll ever know, Polly."

She glanced up, her face as red as her hair, yet smiling as if amused.

"A queer place for love-making," she remarked.

I had made a statement only. I stared, trying to decide whether I were rebuked, or not. She continued—

"Who do you think came in here while you were trying to make yourself look pretty?"

"Not General Jackson?" I eagerly cried. "It couldn't be. He's down on the Coosa."

"Greenberry Spiller. He's waiting to see you."

I was making for the door of the cabin to welcome my old friend but she stepped before me. Shaking her short red locks she timidly asked—

"Is Greenberry still a minister of the gospel?"

"Once a New Light always a New Light, I believe. But why?"

"Then why wait? Why can't he marry us. Then I'll go back to Kentucky and wait for my husband to come home."

She was in my arms, sobbing and trying to talk, when Greenberry Spiller entered. He would have retired had I not commanded him to remain. I asked if he could make a man and woman man and wife.

"I can operate as legally and bindingly as ever," he replied. His promptness and lack of surprize evidenced an advance knowledge of the wedding I had not shared in until now. "And our little Polly McGin! Lawd! who'd ever thought it! Jeffry Lang, you're most fortunate man in all the United States. And to find such happiness here in Huntsville. Not that there was ever a sweeter, better settlement. You can buy land dirt cheap now folks are scared of the Creeks. With growing corn and a distillery—"

I interrupted his babbling with a command that he procure witnesses. He soon returned with two traders, old acquaintances of Joel and mine, and half a dozen grinning soldiers. I always had patronized Greenberry and had ordered him around a bit. I was finding new dignity in the man who had the power to make Polly McGin my wife.

A week later I saw her stowed in a cart and riding up the rough road to the crossing of the Elk, where she would strike into the old Natchez trace and then on to Nashville and Kentucky. When I could not longer see her dear face and catch the flutter of her hand I took my rifle, once the rifle of Nemesio of the *deguello* tune, and started to find General Jackson.

I had crossed the Tennessee and was walking blindly down the army-road, trying to realize my wonderful fortune in having Polly McGin awaiting my homecoming, when a querulous voice broke through my reverie. It was Greenberry Spiller and he was in a bad state of mind.

"Gawdfry mighty! Afraid the fighting'll give out like the whisky did? You oughter be traveling north with your young wife. At least you could-a waited in Huntsville another day so we could get a snort or two of the honest whisky being sent down to the sick soldiers."

"Go back to Huntsville. I'm off to join Jackson's army."

"You're the only man I've made a husband in ten years. I'm going along to see how you behave."

I MISSED the chance of going with General Coffee's mounted men to attack the Creeks gathered at Talassehatchie, situated in open woods and only thirteen miles from our camp. But the infantry was needed to finish Fort Strother and care for the sick. Coffee returned after a day's absence with eighty prisoners to report two hundred hostile Creeks left dead on the battlefield.

I made bold to address the general as he was making the rounds of the sick, and requested I be permitted to serve in Colonel Cannon's mounted riflemen.

"On foot, Mr. Lang. On foot," he bruskly replied. "A soldier can't choose where he will serve. We need men on the ground who won't run. My militia are good boys, but some are homesick. All are underfed. I know you'll do honor to Tennessee even if you don't ride a horse."

His fashion of brushing his hair back, his long straight nose and narrow face, gave him an air of sternness which was forgotten when one learned of his kindly, though fiery heart. He appealed to men because he went straight to his objective. Victory or defeat, but no compromising. Disappointed to have my request refused, I was turning away, when he kindly remarked:

"I used to know a Lang who was in the Chickasaw trade."

"My father. He died when I was a little boy. My step-father was Joel Snow."

"Snow was a good man, Mr. Lang. He possessed the greatest of all assests, honesty, I was grieved when word came he had been murdered."

"His murderer is now with the Creeks, sir. I hope to find him."

"Bring him in and we will hang him."

He was moving away when I ventured to plead.

"At least give me active service, sir. I left a young wife to come down to the fighting."

He wheeled as if impatient, then smiled quizzically and remarked—

"I have men in my army who prefer fighting down here in the Creek Nation to fighting at home."

But this was sacrilege. Before I knew it I was babbling about Polly McGin, of her troubles and escape from Imukfa, and our wedding at Huntsville.

"God bless me! I knew McGin. Such a fighting man! Some talk about his being interested in Mexico. It was forgotten when he came back to Kentucky. He would have gone far, sir, had he lived. No one can remember his leaning toward Burr and Mexico when they recall his brave death at Tippecanoe. And I've heard much about his beautiful and accomplished daughter. I believe I am indebted to her for my Kentucky volunteers. And you've been in the Creek towns a prisoner, and was at Fort Mimms'. Come, come. This is something to tell me. Report tonight at eight. You must know things I and my officers should know."

As the result of that evening with the general and his officers the morning found me something of a celebrity. I attracted fully as much attention because of being the husband of the wonderful Polly McGin as of my imprisonment and escape. Greenberry Spiller, always an arrant gossip, neglected his duties to walk about and tell my adventures with ridiculous embellishments until one wag declared General Jackson would have me shot to prevent me from stealing all military honors of the expedition.

By November seventh we had Fort Strother fit to hold our sick, and the welcome word was passed that we were marching for Taladega at once. This sudden move was occasioned by the arrival of old Chinnaby, a friendly Creek, to report a hundred and sixty friendly Creeks, with their families were besieged in the town by a thousand "Red Sticks," as the war faction was called. Taladega was thirty miles distant and if the friendly people were to be saved the army must strike at once. So closely was the place surrounded, old Chinnaby said, that the only way he could steal out was to crawl on all fours, covered with the skin of a hog, and grunt and nose his way through the red circle under the partial cover of dusk.

Our general was placed in a hard position. We numbered about twelve hundred infantry and eight hundred mounted men. Many were sick, and the bulk of the army was raw militia and inexperienced in war. General Jackson knew the victory must be decisive if the war was to be terminated quickly. To leave the friendly Creeks to perish would have a bad effect on all of Chief McIntosh's party as well as on the Cherokees, who, as a nation, were inclined to help us and already, as individuals, were hastening to carry a red ax against Weatherford. To march with a force sufficient to thoroughly whip the enemy would mean to leave the sick unguarded. Our general's desire to hasten to Taladega was made possible by the arrival of a runner with the glad news that General Cocke's East Tennessee troops were marching down the Coosa. General Jackson wrote an order for Cocke's advance to take over the protection of Strother.

I was fortunate to be in Captain Bledsoe's company, one of the three forming the advance under Colonel William Carroll. General Jackson hurriedly inspected these companies and gave the colonel his orders. On turning away, he saw me and paused long enough to say:

"I see you're to have your wish. But your young wife may not thank me."

"She was Polly McGin. I can't go back and say I had no fighting."

"God send you back safely to that estimable young lady. There'll be fighting enough to go around."

We forded the Coosa a mile above the camp, beginning at midnight. The river was so wide at this point that each horse carried double and was sent back for the rest of the infantry. Several hours were consumed. Without pausing to rest, we started for the besieged town, and by sundown were within six miles of it. That night an Indian runner came from General White, in command of Cocke's advance, stating he had been recalled and could not protect Fort Strother. This intelligence must have been most disturbing to General Jackson. If the enemy had discovered our approach, there was nothing to prevent a portion of them hastening to Strother and massacring the sick and the few guards. If we turned back we would lose standing with all red nations and the friendly Creeks would be exterminated.

The runner arrived at midnight. With characteristic decisiveness our general ordered the adjutant-general to prepare the line for an immediate advance. Our three

companies of riflemen moved four hundred yards in advance of the head of the army, with orders to fall back to the center if opposed, so as to draw the enemy after us. Sunrise found us within a mile of Taladega and practically surrounding it, as the cavalry had pushed ahead on the two extreme wings, moving in a curve, their rear connecting with the advance of the infantry.

The hostile Creeks were encamped by a spring at the head of a tributary to Imukfa Creek and were roughly inclosed by low hills and broken ground. Generals Hall and Roberts with their brigades formed half of the wide circle, with mounted riflemen and cavalry forming the other half. It was close to the latter that the friendly Indians were forted. We of Colonel Carroll's command were well inside the circle, and at eight o'clock we advanced to bring on the battle.

When within eighty yards of a thickly bushed stream we received a volley which we promptly returned, and charged and drove the enemy back. Then we fell back to draw them after us. A most hideous yelling and howling arose. After a few minutes of this clamor the enemy attacked in force, but struck at Robert's brigade on the left of the circle instead of at us who had commenced the battle. Three companies of raw militia were so appalled by the bloodcurdling yells and ferocious appearance of the enemy that they gave ground, breaking the circle.

General Jackson ordered Colonel Bradley's regiment behind the line to fill the gap. As this regiment, for some reason, was too far back to act promptly, the hole was filled by Colonel Dyer's mounted reserves fighting on foot. We of Carroll's command hastened to attack the left flank of the Indians now trying to break through the circle. The gallant behavior of Dyer's men so affected the delinquent militia that they returned to their place and fought most viciously. For fifteen minutes the Creeks fought as bravely as any people ever fought; then broke and fled to the hills and to a gap on the right of the circle between Hall's brigade and the mounted riflemen. Had Bradley come up less tardily, he could have filled this hole and scarcely a Creek warrior would have escaped. As it was we counted two hundred and ninety dead inside the circle. We lost fifteen killed and eighty-five wounded.

Greenberry Spiller found me as the fighting died down and exclaimed:

"Paid off a portion of that Mimms' score. But when I think of the poor women and children down there, it seems as if it never could be paid."

WE BURIED our dead and placed the wounded on litters and started for Fort Strother, already crowded with the sick. The rescued Creeks, with their families, joyfully accompanied us. Had we come a day later they would have been exterminated, as they were dying of thirst when saved. Even before the fighting ended many of them were rushing from the little stockade to drink at spring and stream.

Now followed a most dreary period. Famine became more threatening than the Creeks. We had lived on acorns during the return to Strother, but we had expected to find supplies awaiting us there. There were none, and mutiny broke out. The regiment of drafted militia, starving and homesick, decided to return to Tennessee. General Jackson drew up his regiment of volunteers, composed large of the men who had followed him to Natchez and had given him his name of Old Hickory, and warned the would-be deserters they would be shot if they attempted to leave the camp. The militia returned to their duty.

Now was the time to end the war as the Creeks were greatly depressed by their losses. But low water in the Tennessee held back supplies, and General Cocke considered his command to be independent of General Jackson's. Both were leading Tennessee troops to accomplish the same purpose—to subdue the Creeks. The cavalry requested permission to withdraw to settled parts of the country, as we had no forage for the horses. The men promised to return once they were needed. The request was granted. After the mounted men departed, the volunteers, who had blocked the drafted militia from deserting, insisted they must return to the settlements at once. The militia, recently mutinous, were willing to wait a few days to see if supplies would not get through. General Hall was ordered to march the volunteers to Fort Deposit, an empty supply depot on the Tennessee. Two days later the rest of the army started for Deposit on the understanding we would turn back if we met supplies. Before we

were far from Strother we did meet supplies, but now that their faces were set toward home the militia refused to turn back.

General Jackson snatched a musket from a soldier's hand. His left arm was useless from his fight with Thomas and Jesse Benton, but he rested the barrel of the gun across the back of a horse and swore he would shoot dead the first man to take a forward step. The dramatic tableau endured for a half a minute; a crippled man opposing a thousand. No one moved; no one spoke. Then the silence was broken by a yell of admiration. The applause became general. One man had conquered an army.

Had these men returned to Tennessee the Red Sticks would have believed the Seventeen Fires had lost the war. Other red nations, friendly or neutral, would have believed the same. Far different and most ominous results might well have marred the national effort to win the war. British troop-ships and bomb-ships were off Pensacola. New Orleans was being threatened. Mobile was in the greatest danger. It was fully believed the Spaniards would gladly permit the British to occupy St. Augustine.

It is not my purpose to attempt a history of the Creek war, which was to elevate General Jackson to the presidency. I shall never forget the dramatic moment when the general told the disheartened troops.

"If only two men will stay with me I will stay here."

And I shall never forget how our zeal was rekindled when Captain John Gordon of the Spies quizzically remarked:

"You have one man, General, already. Let's look around and see if we can't find the second man."

As a result of these two remarks a hundred and nine men pledged themselves to stick in the wilderness, come what might.

Half-starved we worried along into the new year. Governor Willie Blount advised Jackson to return home. The general replied that some one must defend the frontier and he insisted on men. The governor set about raising twenty-five hundred men. Supplies commenced arriving at Fort Strother. By the middle of January our little force had increased to nine hundred men. A week later we fought the battle of Imukfa. I being one of the scouts sent ahead, for I knew the ground. General Coffee was wounded and his brother-in-law, Sandy Donelson, was killed. The fighting lasted nearly all day, the field shifting as the enemy feinted at our right and then fell on our left. And I shall always remember this engagement above the others for what happened toward the close of the day. I found Dancer.

He had stripped and painted and was escaping through the woods, and my exhaustion was such that he was welcome to go, until I glimpsed the high shoulder and tilted head. Then I ceased to be weary and, followed by Greenberry Spiller, I ran him down and beat him into submission with my rifle barrel.

"General Jackson said he should hang if I could bring him in. But he must be hung in Kentucky," I told Greenberry. I will not describe any of the groveling pleadings of the monster.

"You going to hang him with your own hands, Jeffry?"

"I vowed it."

"Vows are usually foolish things, and better broken. You're a young husband now."

"I'd have been dead if this beast had had his way when I was a prisoner in Imukfa. If he could be hung a million times he wouldn't have paid for his crimes."

"Not if he was hung ten times a day for all time," heartily agreed Greenberry. "But a new husband. Never done any hanging. It ain't pretty. Now a knife, gently set between his ribs—"

"He shall hang for the terrible beast he always has been. That's settled."

"I ain't arguing, lad. You know best. I'm getting old and the whisky don't keep up with the army. It's a shame. We need a thousand gallons a week to keep us all in proper spirits. Creek water ain't good to fight on. When I think of the McGin house cellar—"

"Don't, Greenberry. My heart's sore."

We tied Dancer to a tree near a sentry post and Greenberry stood guard while I went to report to General Jackson my desire to take the murderer back to Kentucky where I could execute him. Of course it was fantastic; but I was thinking of my dear friend and second father.

He nodded sympathetically as I talked, and then kindly said:

"Young man, the State of Kentucky would never let you assume the rôle of public hangman. I would not be justified

in encouraging illegal killings. I understand something of your terrible resentment against this creature. But we must stand for law and order. We're fighting Great Britain because she didn't observe the law of nations. Although I feel that hanging is too good for that —— villain I haven't any authority to torture him. And the law does not torture. Or it shouldn't. However, I do have authority to deal with him as a traitor caught bearing arms against his country. So you fetch him in and we'll string him up."

To make sure I did this he detailed a squad to go with me. As we approached the tree, Greenberry excitedly announced:

"What do you think, Jeffry? That murderer went and hung himself when I wasn't looking. Wa'n't he the sly one!"

I stared at the swinging figure, the head tilted to the right more than usual. I marveled at his finding enough courage to open that door. One of the soldiers exclaimed:

"Sly? Downright clever! He hung himself without bothering to untie his hands!"

The sergeant stared at Greenberry for a moment, then bruskly announced—

"I shall report the prisoner committed suicide."

Left alone with Greenberry I had nothing to say. He told me after a minute of silence:

"It's new work to me, Jeffry. And I didn't have much time. It's a business that had to be done, or he'd be busting loose to raise more hellry. But it's no work for a young husband. I'll untie his hands. Old Hickory won't ask questions even if the sergeant tells the truth."

We never heard from it.

January, February and much of March wore away with my heart sick for Polly McGin. Then came the decisive battle of the Horseshoe, where the Creeks, with incredible folly, penned themselves up on the point of land. They were almost entirely surrounded by the river, and the neck of land, three hundred and fifty yards wide, was filled with a breastwork from five to eight feet high. Our two field-pieces, mounted on a little hill, could do no damage to this barrier, and the shots caused great derision on the part of the twelve hundred warriors cooped up behind it. For a time it seemed that this peculiar entrenchment might be successful.

MAJOR LEMUEL PURNELL MONTGOMERY, one of the handsomest men I ever saw, and only twenty-eight years old, led the 39th Regiment of regulars in an assault on the stubborn breastworks and was the first man to mount it. He waved his sword and called for his men to follow, and dropped back dead with a bullet through the head. Young Sam Houston, an ensign, with an arrow in his thigh, leaped upon the barrier and plunged down among the Red Sticks, many soldiers streaming after him. The bayonet did what the field-pieces could not do. The fighting spread all over the point, the bushgrowth, fallen timber and other kinds of cover making the fighting most ferocious. Again the prophets were discredited, although they danced and sang and worked themselves into a frenzy. The defenders could not escape by crossing the river, as soldiers held the shore around the bend and our Cherokee allies had crossed and removed their canoes. Jackson's flag, asking surrender and promising kind treatment, was fired upon, and it became a fight of extermination. When the firing ceased at evening nearly six hundred warriors were dead on the point. How many died in the river will never be known. This battle eliminated the Creeks as an enemy and dispelled the black shadow from our southern border and taught other red nations that it was bad medicine to help a foreign power make war on the Seventeen Fires.

The army moved down to the Hickory Grounds at the junction of the Coosa and the Talapoosa, and it was there William Weatherford rode into camp on a gray horse and proclaimed he had been in command at Fort Mimms, although he had endeavored to prevent the killing of women and children. He boldly confessed he had done the Seventeen Fires all the harm he could and had nothing to ask for himself. He came only to ask our general to treat humanely the women and children hiding in the woods. The Creek Nation, he was frank to say, was ruined by the battles at Taladega, Talassehatchi, Imukfa, Econochopoc and the Horseshoe. General Jackson told him to go and round up the fugitives, which he did. He remained in hiding until after the war, to escape the vengeance of those who had lost relatives or friends at Fort Mimms, and thereafter lived in peace on a farm in Alabama.

And now we were all going home. Our general was leading us back to Fayetteville where we would be discharged from service. And I, who had passed through so much without suffering, except from some minor hurts and the general privations, was taken ill. I tried to work out of it. I would not admit it. But before reaching Fayetteville I was out of my head. Greenberry Spiller told me this when I came to my senses and found myself in a bed and saw him seated near by and in the act of pouring himself a drink from a jug.

"What's the matter? What's happened?" I asked.

"God be praised! You've been mortal sick with some kind of a fever. Crazy in the head. Sensible by spells. Then crazy again. Folks come and look at you and then offer to arrange for a burying. You're in Fayetteville."

"How long have I been here?"

"Oh, it's well into May."

"May! Polly will be worrying her pretty head off!"

"I sent word you was ailing, but would be all right. Here are some letters she's sent through. Cruel waste of paper to write to a crazy man." I was too weak to sit up to read them, and my efforts to do so brought on a relapse.

When I was sufficiently recovered I eagerly went through the letters and found them all the heart could wish. But my heart ached a bit to read—

"I'm so sorry, Jeffry, I can't come to you right now."

That one sentence did not sound like Polly McGin speaking. I had always believed she would, at the least, attempt the impossible to reach the one she loved. I secretly fretted over her failure to join me, although to Greenberry I praised her good sense in not making the tiresome trip. We reached Nashville in June and I was promptly put to bed and was compelled to pass through another tedious spell of convalescence. The sick are not to be blamed for their fancies, and even after the doctor said I was fit to travel in easy stages, the shadow did not lift.

July had crossed the threshold when we ended our slow journey. And I felt a strange hesitancy to go to the big house and face my wife. When I did stand before the house I found it closed. I was staring helplessly at the lifeless windows when a woman came out from the side entrance.

"Margy!" I cried, slipping from my horse and running to meet her. "Where's Polly? Why is the house empty?" And I glared suspiciously at her and at the bowed head of Greenberry.

"There, there, Jeffry," soothed Margy, patting my arm. "My, how peaked and thin you do look. And all bleached out—Polly's notional. Once she knew you and Joel were paying for the upkeep of this place since her father's death she just wouldn't live here. She's took smaller quarters; and just as well, I think. You calm yourself and walk along with me and let Greenberry lead your horse."

She was keeping something from me, and I dared not demand the truth. In silence we passed through the town to the riverfront. Not until we turned up the path did I guess the truth.

"Back in the old house they used to live in," I muttered, and stared to see if a boyish figure with a red sash would appear in the doorway.

Not until we were up to the door did it open. My wife leaped from the little veranda for me to catch and hold in my arms. She kept her face pressed closed to mine; nor would she look at me, nor speak, as I carried her inside. I placed her on her feet and whispered—

"At least you might have come to me when I was in Nashville."

She shook her head and with averted face replied:

"Two reasons why I couldn't go to you, Jeffry. Greenberry knew all along, but was afraid to tell lest you kill yourself in trying to get home."

"What has happened that's been kept from me?" I demanded harshly.

She seized my hand and led me to a chamber door and opened it and pointed. Two babies were sleeping on the bed, their faces gravely puckered. One had red hair and one was thatched with black.

Then she was dancing wildly about me crying:

"Twins, Jeffry! Twins! Both boys! Didn't I do well? This one is mine—" she pointed to the red head—"named Joel McGin Lang. T'other's yours— Jeffry Jackson Lang. One for each of us! Both for each of us! And oh, my darling! If you only knew how my heart ached when I couldn't come to you!"

THE END

The ADMIRAL

by S·B·H·HURST

Author of "What Happened Between," "Erased," etc.

YEARS ago, about the time the P & O boats ceased calling at Madras, a battleship and some cruisers moored inside the breakwater. They stayed but a short time, yet their stay gave birth to consequences memorable to many men. And they were born because the Admiral felt lazy. He felt lazy; and so sat down under the awning while a generous sunset made the evening seem even hotter than it was, spite of the ripples of the sea breeze just beginning to reach the ships.

The Admiral watched the shoreward progress of a fleet of catamaran fishermen. He did not call them catamarans because he believed that the only real catamarans are those of Ceylon, which are quite complicated machines with wide outriggers, while the things inhabited by the Madras fishermen were nothing more than clumsy logs, each catamaran consisting of two logs hollowed out a little and fastened together, upon which the almost naked Dravidians squatted, making slow way with paddle or some travesty of sail.

Loaded with fish, these were stubbornly coming shoreward. It seemed to the Admiral that they maintained some sort of order, even if it did seem like the order of a flight of midges, and this argued some one man in charge. A moment later he decided that this idea was fanciful, due to his naval training, and he smiled at the conceit.

The Admiral's ship was at the outer mooring and, as they passed the breakwater, one of the catamarans stopped alongside. He was a sea-scabbed man of better build than the average, and he regarded the battleship with interest. Then he spoke to the Admiral, not with the salaams of the ordinary native, but decently—as the captain of one ship should speak to the captain of another. As his natural language was Tamil, and as few if any sailors know Tamil, he spoke to the Admiral in a queer sort of English. The Admiral answered. They spoke of the weather together, and then asked questions about their respective vessels. The Admiral explained that it was not exactly a part of his duty to buy fish, but he would see to it that fish were bought. He sent for his servant, told the servant to buy fish, and added:

"And Jones, don't you think that chap would feel better if he had more clothes on? That piece of string around his waist can hardly keep him warm, can it, Jones?"

The Admiral at times loved to descend to the facetious, but as it was no part of the servant's affair to tell the Admiral that it was more comfortable to be without clothes in that atmosphere, he agreed with his master.

"Then," went on the Admiral, expanding, "I will give him some clothes. I noticed that you had rolled up an old coat of mine. Give him that!"

"Very good, sir," answered the servant, who had hoped to sell that old coat to his own slight advantage. "I will give him the coat, sir."

The servant did so. The man on the catamaran accepted the gift and went on shoreward with the rest of the fishing fleet. He laid the coat down so that it just escaped the water washing between the logs.

The Admiral felt at peace with the world and still lazy. It had occurred to him to tell Jones to remove the gold braid from the coat, but he had lazily decided that Jones would have sense enough to do that without being told. But Jones, irritated at losing the money the coat would have sold for, merely gave the Dravidian the coat. He never gave the stripes a thought. Also, in his annoyance, he forgot that a cocked hat of the Admiral's, old but still good enough to wear and still better to look at, had been folded up with the coat. The man in the catamaran, as yet unaware of all that had come to him, had gone beyond recall before Jones remembered these things. He then wisely decided to say nothing about his oversight.

Nearing the beach, the man on the catamaran stopped to examine the gift. The other catamarans stopped also, for this man, as the Admiral had laughingly supposed, was the boss and leader of the fleet. Had the Admiral known more about native fishing fleets, he would have known that they never put to sea without a supreme commander.

Now the fleet leader unfolded the coat. He looked like an unusually intelligent Australian bushman; which is not strange, because the bushmen are descendants of the coast wallers of India.

He put on the coat, which fitted rather well. But he was careful not to allow the collar to hide a cloth picture suspended about his neck. This was a picture of a Biblical group which proclaimed the man a Christian, although the people on the cloth had been drowned in perspiration and buried in dirt.

Then, amid exclamations of wonder and delight from his followers, he put on the hat also. That he put it on the wrong way only added to its attractiveness.

Thus arranged he led the way to the beach, for the fishermen lived in crowded huts between Mylapur and old Saint Thome. The smoke of cooking fires was rising a welcome, but the sea breeze robbed the homecomers of their interesting odors.

AS THE fishermen landed, some naval officers, sitting in gharries, watched with interest. The officers were young, otherwise they would have found no amusement in driving out so far from the European districts. They focussed their eyes upon the figure in the coat.

"By George," exclaimed a sharp-eyed midshipman, "the Admiral himself!"

The officers got out of the carriages for a closer view. The coat and hat, the stripes and gold lace stood out in all their glory, blazed upon by the last of the sunset.

"The ——! It *is* the Admiral!"

"Admiral's rigout. Where did he get 'em?"

They approached the fisherman. The coat and hat could not have been stolen, since a Madrasee fisherman could hardly board a battleship and help himself to the sacred property of an admiral. And he could not have bought such things. He would not even if he could. Therefore they had been given to him, and a careless servant had neglected to cut off the insignia.

"But," asked the midshipman, "isn't there a law or something against a blighter like this paradin' around in this Christmas tree finery? Seems to me there is, you know!"

The others, also, had vague remembrance concerning such a regulation.

"We can fix it, though," said a hitherto silent lieutenant.

"How?" came the chorus.

"Make it all regular, of course. Give this Johnny a commission as admiral. He seems to be boss here, anyway!"

The idea was received with enthusiasm, the urbane Dravidian smiled without understanding exactly what it was all about, and the afterglow bathed Madras in tints of subdued beauty.

"Let's tell him!"

"No. Let's fix up his commission first while there's light enough."

"Let Mugliston do it, then. Make him do it. He suggested it, and he was taught how to write when but a child!'

"But don't make it like the testimonial the chap gave his Mohammedan servant in Calcutta. You remember. He wrote, 'This man is the worst —— thief in India.' An' the poor blighter carried the thing around and showed it with pride to prospective hirers of himself until somebody told him what it meant."

"No," said Mugliston, "this shall be done *en regal*, and I'll sign it in proper form."

"What? Sign it as if it was real?"

"Certainly. It's an admiral's commission, ain't it?"

So those happy young men clustered around Mugliston, who began to write in clear script as follows:

To My Trusty and Well Beloved—

"Hey, what's the blighter's name? Ask him, somebody."

They beckoned to the man in the coat and hat, who went to them, and they received from him, as nearly as they could receive it, his name.

"Good," said Mugliston. "Here goes then:"

To My Trusty and Well Beloved Meta Dass: Greeting! Whereas—

And he wrote as much as he could remember and a whole lot more of what he imagined was to be found written in the commission of an admiral of the British Navy.

"Now," he said, carefully surveying his pen in the faint light, "now for the real beauty of the thing. Now for the signature."

And he signed the admiral's commission with an excellent

VICTORIA R. & I.

Now the young men had been too decent to laugh at the appearance of the fisherman in the coat and hat and, during the performance of the commission, in spite of facetious remarks, they had not smiled. So they admired the commission gravely, although gravity at times became difficult.

"My word," whispered a brother lieutenant to Mugliston. "My word, Mug, you're a wonder! That sig's the real article. Think of the banks you could rob. You're wasted in the navy, for what's a lieutenant's pay compared to what you could earn as a forger?"

Meta Dass was more than grave. His raiment had taken on an almost religious significance. That it was the cause of the sahib's writing was obvious, and he decided that they had been sent to meet him by the tired man on the great ship who had ordered his servant to give the coat and hat. This was, therefore, government business, and about it was honor. Well, to Meta Dass, the almost maharaja of the fishing fleet, honor was due. In truth, it had been too long delayed!

The officers found it necessary to salute the commission before presenting it to the fisherman. The saluting was done solemnly, but the midshipman had to turn his head to cough violently.

THEN they lined up, facing Meta Dass, whose followers clustered respectfully behind him. Mugliston advanced a yard, the paper in his hands. Gravely he read the commission, the men behind him saluting again when he came to the signature of the queen. They looked somewhat like mechanical images in an outlandish temple, their faces being a bit strained, as it were. But the soft, cooling sea breeze was as incense burning to the gods of deep places.

Mugliston gave the commission to the proud Meta Dass.

"It's all a bit irregular," he said, as if apologizing to the unseen spirit of the regulations, "but it's awful real to this poor Johnny. Perhaps I had better explain to him. Don't rag, you fellows—" this suggestion was unnecessary— "It's a joke an' all that, but it don't seem like one. This chap thinks it's all real, you know."

"Then tell him it is real, Mug," said he who had spoken of forgers. "Tell him it's real. With so many —— lies on your poor conscience, another won't make any difference. An' tell him what an admiral is. One or two of 'em have told you what you are often enough!"

Mugliston looked at the sea-scabbed man, a figure of humble toil, yet of some mastery of soul. The gulf between them seemed gone.

"Meta Dass!"

The new admiral came closer, and Mugliston noticed a curious smell that seemed to be part of the man.

"Meta Dass—" unconsciously Mugliston fell into a sort of high-brow pidgin— "Meta Dass, great honor has been done you, you understand?"

"Yes, sir, me un'stand."

"The —— you do—er, I am glad you do. Alleesamee, maybe I had better explain some more. This very unusual thing—not happen often, you know. Come to think of it, I don't believe it ever happened before, and it isn't likely to happen again. So, you see, it is a great honor. You now

admiral, as this paper says. And you are the only one just like the one you are."

"Yes, sir, me the only admiral. Me un'stand—boss, big man."

"This chit, this paper says so. You keep him careful, no lose."

Mugliston had lost the high-brow form of address with which he had so gallantly started.

"Me never loose," said Meta Dass firmly, his gnarled fingers clutching the precious document.

"Very well, Admiral," said Mugliston, conscious that his friends were saluting again, and trying to place the not altogether strange smell that clung to the new flag officer.

It was of the sea, but it seemed to be more an intimate part of the sea than any of the sea smells with which Mugliston was acquainted. He thought of the dark, eternal ooze, festering thousands of fathoms deep, and he had a vision of monsters wallowing in that belly of the oceans.

"Very well, Meta Dass," he said, "and I am sure you will be a credit to the admirals of all time. Don't believe admirals have to stand for this sort of jaw when getting their commissions, but this is a bit irregular. I'm no good at preaching, but there's a lot about admirals I could tell you. An admiral must carry on so that he can say, 'Thank God I did my duty' or '—— the torpedos, go ahead!' You savvy?"

"Yes, sir. Me Christian."

"The ——! That makes it easier for me. Next time you happen to be sailin' in company with the missionary who herds your flock, you get him to tell you about some admirals he has heard about. All I can say now is that when the other chap thinks he has you licked, you carry on as if you hadn't really started to fight. That's all just now. Good-by, Admiral."

And saluting as if he were taking leave of his own commander-in-chief, Mugliston departed with his friends. They sat on the midshipman for saying that as Meta Dass was admiral of the fleet, they ought to have given him a union jack to fly at the masthead of his flag-ship.

NOT from the missionary—of whom, for reasons of his own, the Admiral was at that time somewhat shy—but from various sources Meta Dass learned about the lives of great admirals. What he learned fused with the Bible stories of the missionary, and the memory of the tired man who had so colorfully garbed him. But if his ideas were at times hazy, his pride in his title was always clear, and out of the clouds of his imagination he—perhaps half unconsciously—wove the golden thread of a great truth.

He went on giving the law to his people, arbitrating their domestic troubles. He was an admiral, carrying about with him the queen's commission, and he allowed no one to forget this, yet he remained very much the Dravidian fish-waller just as, in spite of his clinging to Christianity, he remained at heart a savage.

The routine of his life was not changed. He wore the gorgeous coat and hat, and the missionary—or another missionary, maybe—gave him a new picture to replace the one effaced, but continual splashings in salt water did not improve the coat, and the wind often blew off the hat. Yet he was known to all as "The Admiral" and, in the giving of his title was never a suspicion of ridicule. At night, out with his fleet, he imagined himself as one of a company of great admirals, and the dream grew with the years.

YEARS passed. Meta Dass was in the process of becoming a legend, which is the naked truth with a few ornaments strung around it. The wonderful coat passed from patches into non-existence, but the Admiral never again went without a coat. He lost the hat, but that troubled him little as he was more comfortable without it, but he was never without an old coat in the inside pocket of which was always, carefully wrapped and sewed, the commission.

Sometimes he would talk about the evening it came to him, how the sahibs saluted, how the queen's name was signed to it. In time he told how she had actually signed it herself, and after her death he almost believed she had.

Years passed. Taking his fleet out to fish in the streaky phosphorescence of the warm night water, the Admiral watched reminiscently a large man-of-war making toward moorings behind the breakwater. He thought of the tired man, the giving of the coat and hat, the writing of the commission, and wondered if any of those

sahibs of old days were on this warship. She did not enter the breakwater as in the old days, but turned and twisted, and the Admiral knew why she did this. All the fishermen knew that a great war raged, although it had not touched them, but only the Admiral knew exactly why the man-of-war took such a course. From orders given, he had guessed the truth, but it was beneath his dignity to explain to his followers who had also heard the orders. A power boat had fussed alongside the Admiral's catamaran weeks before, and an Englishman had hailed:

"Oh, Admiral, how are you. You're lookin' fit. You saw all this work going on around breakwater. Yes? Well, you savvy cable. Yes, cable. Yes, lay big cable there. Now, this is order from burra sahib, you must not let any of your chaps go across that line of cable. You see this line?"

There was no line visible, but the Admiral understood a line of bearing and nodded. He stood easily upon his rocking logs, straightening his old body, proud to confer with this sahib about important matters.

"Good, you see him. Well, you must not pass across that line. Big trouble if you do. Government give you ——, you know. You and your catamarans must keep away off this side—the farther the better. You'll do this, won't you, Admiral?"

"Me do."

"And no let any of your men cross over."

"If he does, I beat him."

"But he mustn't."

"I no let."

"Good egg. By-by, Admiral."

The power boat departed. The Englishman mopped his face, muttering:

"Got to tell 'em something, but can't tell 'em the truth. A warning's all one can do. But that old Admiral's a pretty wise old bird. I wonder how much he knows or guesses. Anyway, he won't talk even if he does know what the cable really is. It's funny, but he'll no more think of telling his men what he thinks or guesses than an admiral in the navy would think of discussin' his battle plans with the ship's cook."

And going out, that still, warm evening, the Admiral watched the course of the warship, and the course she took was drawn upon his brain. He grinned slightly, and his rheumy old eyes brightened. He was an admiral. The Englishman in the power boat had known that he would understand about the cable. But only those in authority have such secrets. He glanced contemptuously at his uncomprehending fellows. Then he watched the man-of-war going into moorings and wondered again about the navy officers of old days, and if any of them were on board this great fighting vessel.

The catamarans went on seaward, the day went out in a blaze of glory and the Admiral chose the place for fishing—about ten miles off shore, the fleet settling around him. The dark covered them like warm velvet. Now and then a man would hum softly a quaint and very ancient tune, but for the most part they fished silently. The Admiral did not fish. His earnings were a percentage of the takings of the others. He crouched, huddled in his coat, thinking of many things, of his youth and the dead. At his feet was the flare pot, ordered to be carried to warn steamers that came too close.

THE hours passed to that one in which the ogre spirits of the land come out to settle their differences with the green ones of the deep. The fish had stopped biting. The hour could be told by their appetites, for it was known that they were afraid to eat when the spirits bickered. The Admiral, drowsing, heard a grunt and a gurgle, then a splash. It roused him as it roused others, who chattered.

"Who made that noise?" he growled.

Three men made answer.

"Ramysawmy made it."

The Admiral considered. He did not like to be disturbed this way. He would enjoy brow-beating Ramysawmy, whom he did not like, either.

"Send Ramysawmy to me," he ordered, speaking as a rajah who does not address a culprit directly.

"He cannot be sent," many voices made reply.

"Why not?" rasped the Admiral.

There was a silence.

"Why not—?" the Admiral spoke beyond print.

A new voice made reply.

"Because he has gone to ——," answered this new voice with grim assurance.

"Oh," the Admiral spoke almost casually. "Who sent him there?"

"I did," said the new voice, while the fleet breathed whisperingly through the dark, and the water between the catamarans seemed to laugh as at some great jest.

"Then come over here to me and tell me why you sent Ramysawmy to ——," commanded the Admiral.

For although he would report that a man had fallen overboard and had been drowned in spite of desperate efforts to save him, his head struck against a catamaran and he sank immediately, and the authorities would pretend to believe him, since it was worse than useless to try to investigate, the Admiral always insisted on having the details of such affairs, and his men never lied to him. They knew that he would discover the lie, and preferred what he might say about their taking his law into their low hands to what he might order done when he found out that a lie had been told to him.

So the man who had sent Ramysawmy to —— worked his catamaran alongside the flag ship. Even in that thick dark, the Admiral could see the ripples of emotion contorting the man's face.

"Well?" the Admiral asked shortly.

The man's breath came in sobs, his body twitched.

"Ramysawmy was familiar with my wife," he said, mastering his gaspings.

"Oh," chuckled the Admiral cruelly. "And you were never familiar with another man's wife?"

The man seemed about to argue, but the Admiral cut him short.

"Son of many liars," he said, "if you never were it was because the woman would have none of you. Besides, what is a woman, anyhow?"

And the admiral gestured easily as one may, whom age has made immune.

"Very little," admitted the man, "unless she happens to be your own."

"The woman is not the point, fool," the Admiral barked somewhat inconsistently. "The point is that you killed without first asking me. There are many, less kind than me, who would order you killed, perhaps slowly, for doing this. You have heard of what the old Rajah of Travancore used to do! You neither consulted me about your filthy domestic affairs nor gained my consent to send Ramysawmy to ——. But because Ramysawmy was no use on earth and because he will suffer horribly in hell, he was a Christian, as we all are, and the Christian hell is the worst of all hells, which is something for you to think about.

"Because I did not like Ramysawmy, I will be good to you and make the punishment a light one. You have given me trouble, for I shall have to make report about a man drowned, and I am tired of being bothered with making reports. Besides, I have made so many of the same sort that I often see the magistrate sahib grin under his mustache when I make them, as if he did not quite believe what I said. I do not like to be thought a liar, because it lowers me to your level. For this trouble you have given me you will pay me one rupee. Go!"

It was a large fine as such fines went, but the man did not protest. He went away in his catamaran, thinking that it was almost worth a rupee to have the fun of sending Ramysawmy to ——, but that it was far too much to pay for a wife's protection. No wife was worth so much. He would give her a large beating next day when the fleet went home.

THEN the fish started biting again, and the Admiral drowsed. Into his dreaming crept a measured pulse. Then it stopped. It came again, lulling him. It again stopped, and its stopping aroused him. As he opened his eyes to stare around the measured beat started again. It was an approaching steamer, but what puzzled the Admiral was its stopping and then going on again—its hesitating, as it were, its feeling its way. There was no need for any steamer to feel its way in those waters.

The men went on fishing, hardly taking any notice. They left decisions to the Admiral, although he was sarcastic about making flares and had said that it didn't matter much if a steamer hit a catamaran—it couldn't hurt the steamer. So the peculiar actions of the approaching steamer escaped even those fishermen who had heard her, for as yet there was no sight of her.

The Admiral stared in the direction of the sound. The engines were going very slowly. Then they stopped again and again went on. The Admiral decided that there was engine trouble. He wondered at her showing no lights until he recollected a similar phenomenon, and remembered being

told that the machine making the lights had gone wrong with the rest of the engines. Knowing nothing of engines or dynamos, the rarity of such an occurrence did not trouble his present conclusions.

The steamer came quite close to the catamarans before the Admiral heard her stop again. She acted very quietly, so that he saw her looming like a darker cloud against the rest of the night. His men began chattering loudly, but not a one dared suggest to the Admiral that he light the flare. Then the Admiral heard—but so quietly was it done that the sheaves of the blocks hardly made a sound—heard a boat lowered. This was distinctly unusual, and the Admiral could imagine no reason for it. The sahibs could hardly have stopped and lowered a boat to buy fish. Steamers had occasionally bought fish during the years of the Admiral's tenure, but they had never lowered boats in order to do so. They had shouted for the catamarans to come alongside. The boat rowed softly towards the fleet. The chatter of it could be heard a mile or more on that still air. The boat stopped alongside a catamaran some distance from the Admiral's, and a voice asked in English.

"Who boss man here?"

A dozen fishermen directed the questioner to the Admiral.

"Hush, you chatter like a lot of parrots." The officer in the boat seemed needlessly irritated. "So—" as the boat reached the catamaran of the crouching Admiral—"so, you head man here, eh?"

The Admiral did not like to be called head man, for so many years no sahib had ever called him anything but Admiral, but he grudgingly admitted that he was.

"So, and you fish around here long time, eh?"

The Admiral had fished around there for more than fifty years, and said so.

"Good," went on the boat's officer. "And you know coast and harbor pretty well, eh?"

"I know him all—outside breakwater, inside—long way out. I know him all," replied the Admiral proudly.

"Good, very good," said the officer. "And you see big ship—big fight-ship—go in harbor today?"

"Yes, I see him go in."

"Good. Well, that big ship and my ship consorts—friends, you know—and come long way to here, from England. Come along with him, but our engines break down."

"Yes, I heard him," interrupted the Admiral.

"Eh?"

"I heard him stop. Then you go ahead again, then stop."

The officer smiled, his voice became even more cordial.

"That is so. You observant man. Good. Engines break down. Big ship in hurry, no can wait. So my ship come along alone. Now I don't know way in. Never been here before. Want pilot. Pay you five rupees."

The officer turned his face from the Admiral and looked at the dim, pearly faces of his impassive men, thinking:

"As the captain said, it's our only chance. To try to get in without local help would mean failure. This man may be an efficient pilot. He ought to be if he knows about the mines. When we get him on board we must find out about that, but we are certainly no worse off with him than without him. If he can take us through, it's our one chance to pull off the big thing. If we get her, nothing else matters. But will he suspect when we ask questions? Why should he—when he thinks we are English? And what if he does? He won't bother about it. The money is all he will think about. India is seething with revolution, and these fellows hate the British."

He turned to the Admiral.

"Well, hurry up! Will you take us in?"

"Not enough money," grunted the Admiral.

"All right, I give ten rupees," said the officer quickly.

The Admiral simulated entire lack of interest in ten rupees, a large sum to a Dravidian fisherman.

"You wait today. See way in yourself then," he said indifferently.

"I give thirty rupees, and that's my last offer," snapped the officer.

This was tremendous money to the Admiral, but he hesitated artistically. Since the night of the commission his great, unattainable dream had been to be, if but for a moment, a person of importance on board an English man-of-war. His musing upon the lives of great admirals had woven this into a living if pathetic ambition. He was proud to be asked to pilot the ship, but the instincts of the centuries caused him to

appear as if falling asleep. There was even the simulation of a snore.

"All right, then."

The officer gave low-voiced orders. He seemed about to return to his ship.

"I take you in," said the Admiral. "First, give me money."

The officer did not want to waste any more of the darkness. He gave the Admiral the thirty rupees, and the Admiral called to a man who sometimes acted for him.

"I am going to command this warship," he said. "Afterwards, they will then send me on shore with honor. You take care of the fleet."

ONCE on board, the Admiral shook off his seeming indifference, became much interested and alert. Taken to where he could con, he began to talk to the officer as a friend to whom he wished to show off all he knew. It was an opportunity the Admiral had long waited for.

"Go in different way now," he said to the boat officer who stood by his side and talked English so easily.

"So," the officer was keenly alert.

The Admiral laughed.

"Yes, you know—mines. But only me know. Sahib say 'Don't cross line of cable,' but I savvy. And I watch big ship and know how she go inside. Twist this way, then that way so not to touch mines. My low fellows, they no savvy. Think cable and I no tell 'um."

The officer could have hugged the old man. But he restrained himself. This was luck beyond anything hoped for. He had expected a long siege of questions to find out if the Admiral knew about any mines. Luck was with them, and they would torpedo the battleship. After that, whether they got out again safely or not did not matter so much.

"Yes, I know," he said casually. "You be careful you don't hit one of them, or big noise and go to ——, you know."

"I savvy," the Admiral grinned appreciatively.

"Our orders are to anchor alongside big ship, so you take us same way," said the officer.

"I do it," said the Admiral, thinking that the engine trouble had been mended, since the ship went ahead slowly, but without hitch. "Why no lights?" he asked, his mind reverting to what he had once been told about engines and lights.

"Orders not to carry lights," said the officer readily.

"Oh, I savvy."

They went on, the night hiding them. The Admiral was seldom a self-analyst, but he wondered at the tense feeling of excitement that had got under his skin until the tense mental atmosphere of all aboard began to stimulate his old brain.

"I Admiral," he said to the officer.

"Eh?"

"Yes, long ago men like you give me commission, writing by queen." Here the Admiral saluted, to the concealed amusement of the officer. "It in here." The Admiral thrust his hand inside his coat and crackled the paper. "I know fight ships, like this. You have—what you call—shoot out in front, run along water and hit other ships—*bang*, eh?"

"Of course," the officer felt that this was something like a game of chess. "All English ships like this one have torpedos."

"Of course. I savvy," said the Admiral. "I think you better *dhow torra*."

The officer, acquainted with the vernacular of the colashes, told the man at the wheel—

"Port!"

"Port, sir," answered the man in excellent English.

"*Marram*—steady you go," ordered the Admiral, and he was obeyed.

"*Weejow*—starboard—*torra, torra*," he said to the officer who transmitted the course to the man at the wheel.

Thirty rupees. Thirty useful pieces of silver. They would buy much comfort. Thirty rupees! But why did he feel so uncomfortable about the money?

This problem whirled in the Admiral's brain until he almost forgot the officer and the ship on whose bridge he stood.

Then it came to him, suddenly as a shooting star and flashing like a star. Thirty pieces of silver. The story his various missionaries had so often told. The awful betrayal. The low Judas. Thirty pieces of silver, the price paid for betraying the Son of God, as the missionaries had explained. That was it. But why, the Admiral wondered, should this concern him at that moment. True, he had been paid thirty pieces of silver, but it was for doing honorable work, for piloting a British ship

to where she could anchor alongside her friend; for guiding her safely past the dangerous, deadly mines. Why should he feel disturbed?

Driven by the tremendous urge of the story of the great betrayal, the old Admiral's brain began to work as it had never worked before. In some strange way that story had become connected with the commission in his pocket and with the thirty rupees. Honor in his pocket, but also, thirty pieces of silver. But this was silly. He was being paid for doing honorable work. But was it work of honor? Of course it was. Piloting a British ship. How could that be otherwise than honorable? And, anyway, thirty rupees would buy many desirable things.

"*Dhow torra,*" he said, irritated, trying to forget the story that clings about thirty pieces of silver.

But he could not put it out of his mind. And then, suddenly, he found himself considering very carefully the manner of his hiring, the quiet of it, the behavior of the ship on which he stood. And he understood. War, and this ship an enemy. Would the safety of an English ship coming to anchor have been left to the chance of his being picked up? The Admiral felt humble, then angry. Would an English ship not have known the passage through the mines? No lights, no signals? He did not need to go on. The Admiral respected fighters. The men on this ship were brave men. They wanted to blow up the big ship in the harbor. This was fair war. They were risking their lives for their king and country. He saw it all, and thirty rupees haunted him. What was Meta Dass, with his British commission and the enemy's thirty pieces of silver?

WELL, he could take this ship safely past the mines, and thirty rupees would buy many desirable things. It was wealth, and the ship on whose deck he stood was absolutely safe with him guiding her. Why should he trouble. He was an old man. He had not made the war. And the thirty pieces of silver the missionaries talked about had to do with affairs very different from ships—that thirty was not the thirty of Meta Dass, and times had changed since thirty pieces of silver was the price of betrayal. It might not mean the same thing now. It was not his affair.

If it was, the government or some sahib should have told him not to pilot enemy ships. He had not been told, or even paid by the government. And this fair-spoken officer had given him thirty rupees. Was it not his duty to be honest and earn the money?

They were closing in on the mine field. The crew stiffened at their stations, torpedos ready.

"*Beechme secun,*" said the Admiral, and the officer translated to the man at the wheel.

Thirty rupees. On that big ship inside might be sleeping the sahib who had given the commission, the tired man who so long ago had given the coat and hat. The Admiral's twitching fingers gripped at the paper in his pocket. Thirty pieces of silver!

"*Weejow,* now. You soon pass mine and anchor."

"Good," the officer seemed to find it difficult to breathe.

There came to the Admiral memories of what he had been told about the lives of great admirals, and these admirals seemed to be watching him.

It was very easy and quite natural for Meta Dass to feel that the spirits of those great dead were gathered there to watch him. Almost he could hear them talking about him. Real, living spirits, whispering to one another. His old figure straightened. He felt very proud. Then he felt the thirty rupees in his pocket.

Very quietly the enemy ship crept forward. The night grew darker before the dawn. They were at the passage between the mines. To go on as they were meant going through clear. Either to port or starboard meant striking a mine.

"*Weejow sicar*—hard a-starboard," commanded the Admiral in a clear voice.

He patted the pocket containing his commission, then thrust the thirty rupees into the hand of the astounded officer, whose starting eyes saw this aged and uncouth fisherman salute some one invisible as the lieutenant of the commission had saluted so long ago.

The spirits of the great admirals took shape. And the instant before the ship struck the mine and was blown into indistinguishable fragments, the Admiral said with a sigh of satisfaction:

"Thank God. Done my duty!"

JERIAS

A Complete Novelette

by ELMER BROWN MASON

THE Alaska night was sharp with frost. In the shadow of tree and rock patches of snow still lingered, fringed with bright flowers that had drunk from their melting edges. No wind stirred, and the black firs were motionless as the rocks.

Suddenly a snow-shoe rabbit hopped across an open glade, glanced back fearfully, vanished. A moment later appeared the first of its pursuers, a big dog-fox, exquisite in its shining coat of silver gray. It paused, barked impatiently. There was an answering bark and a smaller fox drifted to its side. The vixen was thin from the cares of maternity and her coat not so fine as her mate's. There was, however, no criticism of her beauty in the male's attitude. He touched his nose to hers fondly, took a step forward and glanced back at her as if to say, "Shall we go on, my dear?" The vixen was uncertain. This was the first time for many days she had hunted with her mate, and her heart was with her pups in a moss-lined hollow of the rocks. She sat down firmly.

The big fox sniffed at the rabbit trail, then turned regretfully. He, too, sat down, lolling out his tongue and beaming upon her while awaiting his lady's pleasure. For a fortnight he had hunted alone, bringing his kill to the mouth of the cave; then, at her warning snarl, stepping aside while she dragged it within. Even though the rabbit was close ahead, was it not worth while waiting a bit to have her with him again?

The little wind that heralds dawn woke the sleeping firs to soft whisperings. The foxes wheeled to it, raised their noses, sniffed. It was the vixen who moved ahead this time. The big fox slipped abreast of her but she snarled him back. Close to the ground and indistinguishable from the other shadows, the two foxes went up wind. Once they froze, motionless; then stole on to sniff distrustfully at the track of shoe-packs in a patch of snow. Both jumped the tainted trail, then forgot it in the meat-odor which tantalized their nostrils. Another hundred yards. They froze again, staring suspiciously from cover at the object before them.

In a glade between the firs stood a long box. It was apparently open. Light shone through from the opposite end. Two doors, running in grooves, and heavily weighted at the top, were raised straight up at each end of it. Within lay three dead rabbits.

The big fox moved against his mate, cautioning her in the voiceless language of the wild that there was danger. The vixen growled. She was hungry, with the furious hunger of the nursing female who must have food to make the milk for her young. Inch by inch she slipped into the glade nearer the box. For a long moment she hesitated, warned by the god of the lesser souls as much as by the whimper of her mate. Then that delicious meat-scent came again. She glided nearer. Surely it would be easy to dash into that strange cave, snatch up a rabbit and be out again before harm could come to her. Again the dog-fox whimpered, but she

snarled back at him, then launched forward. Triumphantly her jaws closed on a rabbit and she shot on straight through the box toward the light at the other end. There was the crash of a door falling behind her, then her nose bruised painfully on the thick plate of glass midway in the trap.

The big fox, already nervous and anxious, gave a startled bark as the door slid down between him and his mate, then sprang, red-eyed and slavering. His teeth slipped harmlessly off the metal-guarded corner of the box. He whirled around it. Then his fear lessened and he barked encouragingly. The other end was open—he could see his mate plainly. Why did she writhe in the middle of the strange cave instead of coming out? He sat down and peered at her puzzled; barked again, reassuringly. She growled chokingly with mingled rage and fear. Fearfully he stepped inside, stretched toward her. Another cautious step forward! The door slid down back of him and his nose brushed the hard substance which his eyes told him was not there but which kept him from his mate.

Coming over the snow the old trapper saw that both doors were down.

"Got them silvers at last, both of 'em!" he grunted to himself with satisfaction.

Leaning over the box he slid back a panel, beneath which was a screen of heavy wire, and peered within.

The foxes crouched motionless in the farthest corners, their burning eyes meeting his unblinkingly and expressionless.

II

MR EMERSON was wet, cold, and uncomfortable. He had ridden the fifteen miles from Bath in a rickety flivver over a rough Maine road, and there was still another mile to go. As the car twisted out of ruts and bounced over thank-ye-ma'ams he gazed about him with distaste. The way led through what had once been thick spruce that had been unskillfully lumbered and then burnt off three years before. There were a thousand acres of it, rising from the sea to a great hill. It was too early yet for the soft green of poplar and cherry—that springs up like magic on burnt land—to hide the nakedness of the blackened trees, broken and piled in thick windrows. There were still some patches of spruce which the fire had spared. Emerson made a rapid mental calculation as to the advisability of cutting them; then regretfully decided that he would lose money; they were too scattered.

The flivver came to a grinding stop where a little fishing village hugged the shore, and the passenger ran through the rain into the general store. The half dozen fishermen loafing inside nodded to him; then looked away.

"Where's Ezra Squam?" Emerson asked.

"Jes' stepped out," the store-keeper vouchsafed. "Be back, I guess."

"Seen anything of the *Alice M?* She's bringing some—some freight for me from Portland."

"Ez 'lowed he sighted her jes' 'fore the las' squall. Nobody else seen her. 'Spectin' 'em foxes he's ter take off ter Gull Island?"

"What do you mean—foxes?" Emerson's voice betrayed his annoyance.

"Foxes ye writ 'bout in yer letter."

"How did you happen to see the letter ?"

"Ez, he don't read right well," the store-keeper explained simply, "so I read it fer him. 'Em foxes air some costly, ain't they?" he persisted.

"They're not worth one cent this time of year," Emerson answered shortly. "Oh, there you are, Squam!"

The huge man shook hands with him limply, looked about in embarrassment, then found words:

"The *Alice M*'s jes' comin' in. Sighted her 'fore ye come."

"That's fine. Come over here, I want to talk to you," and he drew him aside. "You got my letter? Yes, I know you did. Well, I've seventeen foxes, all silver grays except two—a blue fox from Siberia with its mate. There are five full grown silvers, all mated, two young males and three young females. You understand the proposition? I give you your living on Gull Island for your care of the foxes. I want you to understand right here that they're worth a lot of money and I'll hold you responsible for them. You agree to that?"

"Ef some sh'd die, would I hev ter pay fer 'em?" Ezra Squam asked cautiously. "Fer I don't want ter take 'em on no sich terms."

"Well—not if it isn't your fault," Emerson conceded. "You'll have to feed them

in winter, though. I'll pay for the food, of course."

"I guess it's all right 'ith me, then," the big man said. "They shift fer theirselves in summer?"

"Yes— There's the *Alice M* whistling. You got your boat here to take them over?"

"Sure."

"Well, soon as you get them on Gull Island just turn them loose. They'll be perfectly safe—no danger of them trying to swim the three miles to the mainland."

" 'Low not," Squam agreed.

FROM the moment the big silver fox and his mate had been trapped they uttered no sound. When food and drink were introduced into the box they retired to the farthest corners and crouched motionless. It had taken the male many days to realize he could not scratch a way through to his mate. It was a long time before either ate or drank. This was fortunate for the vixen. Her udders, swollen with milk for the first week, hurt her agonizingly. Gradually, however, fasting took care of her and the pain subsided. As time went on she forgot her young back in the moss-lined crevice in the rocks, began to drink a little and then to eat, until she finally took eagerly the food slipped into the box. The dog-fox was less reconciled. He ate hardly at all. His coat suffered less than hers, however, which soon grew ragged like that of a mangy dog. His silver fur lost all its lustre and shed profusely but was still beautiful.

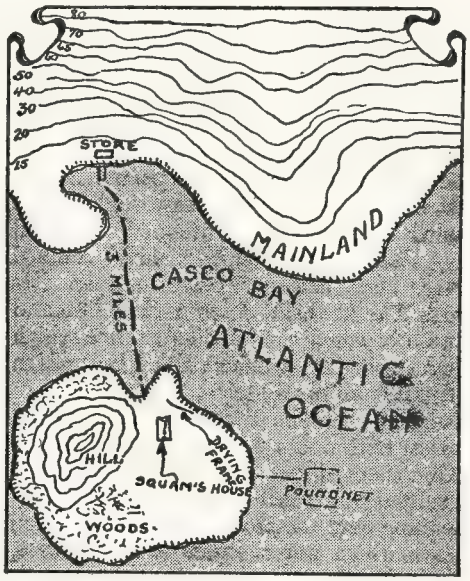
He was soon conscious that other foxes were near, even before they gained courage to bark during the later part of the voyage. But he never barked in reply, only bared his teeth silently and flexed his long body as though for a spring.

IT WAS low tide when the little freighter nosed her way cautiously up to the dock that ran out from the general store. Her deck was fully fifteen feet below the dock level. Emerson looked down anxiously at the cases that held his foxes.

"How you going to get them up here, Captain?" he called.

"I 'lowed ye'd git 'em up 'ith the crane," the captain answered, "an' I'd be 'bliged ter ye ef ye'd hurry. They smell like all gitout."

The fishermen, who had gathered on the dock in spite of the rain, laughed appreciatively. A tackle was run down from the small crane, caught about a box, and it swung up on the dock. It was an easy job, quickly handled—too quickly! As the box that held the big silver and his mate came up to dock level the crane swung in too soon, the box tipped, caught on the fluke of one of a pile of pound anchors, and the top ripped clean away.



If their prison had been suddenly opened the foxes would have made no attempt to escape; only crouched lower. As it was they were catapulted out on to the dock. The big male found his feet in a second and had a clear way to the shore. The female fell among the anchors, however, and Emerson caught her by the scruff of the neck.

At her growl of fear the dog-fox turned like a flash, sprang, and his teeth ripped across Emerson's knuckles. With an oath the man dropped his captive who shot through the crowd, past the store to land, then straight up the hill into the woods above.

"There goes five hundred dollars!" Emerson wailed, "Did the other get away too?"

"I got him," Ezra Squam said, looking up from where he had tied a sack over the big fox's head and bound his legs together.

"He ripped my hand open, —— him,"

the owner said angrily, and aimed a kick at the animal.

Squam reached out a great hand and caught the foot, nearly upsetting him.

"Ye shouldn't do 'at," he said quietly. " 'Low he's worth more'n the one got 'way."

III

IT TOOK two trips for Ezra Squam to transport the unwieldy boxes across the three miles of tide rip to Gull Island. After he had tied his Hampton boat to her mooring and rowed ashore in his dory he turned his attention to releasing the big silver. A knee planted firmly on its neck, he removed the sack from over its head and cut the lashings that bound its feet together. Then, springing clear, he stood up and watched curiously for what the fox would do. It did nothing! So motionless was it, in fact, that Squam began to wonder if it were dead. He moved nearer, looked down at it, saw that its eyes were open. For a long moment man and fox stared at one another, the man's eyes speculative, the fox's cold with hate. Ezra snapped his fingers, still the big silver did not move.

"Ye're some han'some, an', I 'low, some mad," Squam said finally. "Thar's no harm comin' ter ye, leastways not now. Yes, ye're some han'some!" He was silent, staring down at the motionless animal, then spoke again. "Kinder interestin' ef I knowed what idears wuz in 'at long head uv yourn—yes, kinder interestin'. I ain't nev' seen no fox jes' like ye. Guess I better make a name fer ye. Le' see, now, who do ye favor 'at I know?" He paused again, scratched his head; then inspiration came and he slapped his knee delightedly. " 'Uncle' Jerias Wallace, 'at's who ye favor. I'll call ye Jerias—'at's who ye be, Jerias!"

He bent down to the prone silver gray form as though to perform some primitive rite of christening, then straightened quickly as the fox bared its teeth in a silent snarl of hate.

"Wa-al, be 'bout yer business an' I'll be 'bout mine," he laughed, and turned toward the wooden prisons of the other foxes. Methodically he knocked off the tops with the back of an old ax, the inmates making no attempt to escape, but cowering in corners.

The last box opened, he glanced back. Jerias was sitting up watching him. Squam waved his hand. Like a shadow the fox slipped away among the rocks.

GULL ISLAND was about fifteen acres in extent, wooded with spruce and balsam and scattering hardwoods. There was a sandy beach running back a hundred yards to end in a steep bank where the martins dug their nests in summer. Near the beach was a small house. A larger barn, now in ruins, stood facing the mainland, its back some fifty feet from the steep bank. A bare hill, two hundred feet above tide level, rose on the northern side and protected the house from the roaring winter gales. All the shore was precipitious and rocky, save for the one strip of sand. At the southern end a pound net was set in summer.

Mr. Emerson owned Gull Island and rented it to Ezra Squam for a small sum each year. In addition Squam tended the pound net for him on a one-third share basis, and had grown rich from it according to fishermen standards.

Gull Island suited Ezra exactly. Of mixed English and Swedish parentage, he was a huge man, a hard worker and, as such, despised the prevalent shiftlessness of shore fishermen. He had no craving for companionship, in fact repulsed tentative offers of friendship. Newspapers or books had no meaning for him since he could not read. The work which brought about his steadily increasing balance in a Portland savings bank interested him much more than the money. His one relaxation was an ancient fiddle on which he played the few tunes he knew and unconsciously improvised, imitating the roar of the sea, the cries of gulls, and the song of the summer birds that sojourned briefly on the sea-girt kingdom over which he ruled.

In summer he tended the pound, fished a little, dried hake and cod for the winter, and hauled his lobster traps. The shores of Gull Island provided excellent lobstering, and he had a monopoly of it. He took his catch from the pound once or twice a week to Portland. Once a week he went to the mainland to meet the smack that bought lobsters. During the winter he visited the mainland only once every thirty days, storing up until the first Monday of each month the lobsters that he caught far off shore during the cold weather.

THE big silver stayed near the house. Crouched in a crevice between two rocks he watched Squam bring water from the well, carry in an armful of stove wood, and spread out a round cunner net on the rocks to dry.

After his long confinement in the narrow box freedom made the fox fearful. The world was too big and without sides. He decided to look for his former prison. His mate would be there. Perhaps, even, the hard air that had so long separated him from her would have disappeared and he could touch his nose to hers. In the gloaming he approached the house cautiously. A light shone suddenly from a window and he flattened to the ground. He could hear Squam moving about inside, but he had heard men moving about his prison and no harm had come of it. Then something else attracted his attention. As daylight faded, the other foxes were beginning to stir. A head lifted above the side of the case nearest to him. Then a young silver fox slid out, streaked for the woods. Others followed. Jerias snarled at them silently. He was willing to fight if attacked but he was yet too strange to his surroundings to feel aggressive.

As darkness fell the foxes moved about more freely. Those who did not linger by their former prisons disappeared into the woods—all but the big silver. He began to search in earnest for his mate. There was no smell of her around the house, so he explored the barn—the outside only. From the barn he went down to the beach, investigated a pile of lobster traps, a discarded and rusty engine, a miscellany of odds and ends. Then he caught a foot in the cunner net and barked with fright. In revenge for the scare he systematically gnawed it from its round iron hoop.

From there Jerias went further along the shore. He came to a long, loosely built scaffolding, protected with a frame of screening underneath which split cod and hake were drying. It was easy to drag two fish down between the boards. After he had eaten he found a pool of water nearby and drank deeply.

Still there was no scent of his mate. Surer now of his ground, he trotted back to the house. There was a bright tin basin on a rude bench by the doorstep. It fascinated Jerias. He stood up on his hind legs and sniffed it. There was a strong human taint to it but its brightness overcame his repulsion. He took it in his teeth and trotted back to the crevice between the two rocks. For a while he played with his treasure like a puppy, pushing it away, springing at it, then took it farther into the woods. Once his senses told him that another dog-fox was near. He dropped the basin and, standing high on his legs, growled. He felt the other fox hesitate, then slink away.

Jerias was growing tired. It was nearly four o'clock and becoming rapidly light. Under a big oak he scratched leaves over the basin then stole into a close-growing thicket of young spruce. For a long time he listened, turning his nose in every direction sniffing the message of the air. Then, satisfied that all was well, he curled up and went to sleep.

SQUAM woke at four o'clock, looking forward to the day with the quiet pleasure of a man whose hours are to be fully filled. There were his lobster traps to be hauled and rebaited, a task which would keep him busy until nearly noon, the more so as he planned to use the cunner net, since his store of lobster bait was running low. The pound anchors, which held the kegs to which the rim of the great net was attached, must be sunk in place. This was a task that Squam set himself each Spring as soon as the tiny green and brown knobs of the spruce developed into cones, the closely compressed royal purple scales edged with red. When the cones opened to the semblance of little purple-crimson roses he set the net itself. Even before turning to these major tasks the house must be redded up, the drying fish turned, and, since he was a painfully neat man, the cases in which the foxes had come piled in the barn.

Once Squam chuckled at the thought of Jerias. The big silver fox was so well named, his sharp nose and gray fur so exactly recalling the pointed features and flowing gray beard of Uncle Jerias Wallace.

The disappearance of the tin basin troubled Squam. He clearly remembered having seen it in its usual place the night before. A rapid search failed to reveal it, however. He was still puzzling over it as he washed the breakfast dishes and only dismissed it from his mind when he went out to attend to the drying fish.

Jerias was not the only fox that had found this easy source of food. Fully a dozen fish had been dragged down through the wide spaces between the bottom boards. Squam found the fox tracks and grinned.

"By king, they're some smart!" he said aloud, and scratched his head for a solution to the problem. Wire netting underneath as well as on top, was the obvious answer, but Squam did not have any more wire netting. Besides, it cost money. He brought a bundle of trap laths from the barn and nailed them crosswise beneath the scaffolding. As he worked he ruminated on his charges, deciding that he would scatter fish for them the next time he set trawl.

Just as his task was finished he heard a fox bark near the house. Laying down his hammer and tin of nails, Squam hurried toward the sound, realizing that he had left the door open and that his precious violin lay on a chair in the kitchen.

There was no animal in sight, however, and he closed the door and went toward the cases in which the foxes had come. Picking up one case under each mighty arm he carried them into the barn. Something prompted him to go to the rear and peer out through one of the large cracks toward the steep sand bank.

"By king!" he exclaimed. "By king, ain't 'at som'thin'!" and gazed in awe at what he saw.

A little female had scratched a shallow cave at the base of the sand bank and lay there, suckling her new-born young. Even as Squam watched, a dog-fox came trotting from the woods, laid a dead rabbit near, then retreated a dozen yards and sat down, tongue lolling, while the vixen rose, snatched the rabbit, and, with an ungracious snarl in the direction of her mate, went back to her den and gathered her young to her swollen udders.

For a quarter of an hour Squam watched the small mother, then went back to carrying in the empty cases, his mind busy with the foxes. He wondered if Jerias would take a mate or remain true to the one who escaped on the mainland. If they all bred as fast as that Mr. Emerson ought to make a good thing out of it.

Squam's sense of humor failed on discovering the ruined cunner net. Suddenly he realized that nothing was safe—and that his morning was gone. By the time he had finished mending the net it was well past noon.

When the forty traps had been hauled and rebaited, the captured lobsters placed in the car floating near shore, and two bushel baskets filled with cunners, it was five o'clock. Squam hesitated for a moment, undecided whether to get out what pound anchors he could before dark, then determined to call it a day. He cleaned and boiled a small cod which had got into one of his lobster traps, ate his dinner, then came out on the door step, violin in hand.

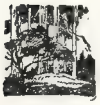
The early May evening was redolent with the promise of summer. The Balm of Gilead trees were spiked with great aromatic buds; maple leaves had uncurled; the aspens bore drooping catkins.

Squam glanced toward the barn to see if the swallows had come. There was a single advance scout skimming above the roof. The martins that nested in the sand bank would not arrive until much later. His thoughts lingered for a moment with the fox family that had so quickly found a home. Then, with a sigh of content, he tucked his violin under his chin.

Ezra knew but four tunes. He started with the "Arkansas Traveler," went on into the "Flower of Edinboro" and "Fisher's Hornpipe," finishing up with a spirited rendering of "Old Zeb Coon." For a moment he laid his violin in his lap, regretting that he knew no more pieces, then tucked it back under his chin. The bow hesitated till he found the right note and then the violin sang the evening song of a mating robin. Next a chicadee chattered cheerfully through the strings, gulls screamed, and finally, in unconscious continuity, the sea spoke, first in soft whisperings against the shore, then in the crash of long Atlantic rollers, and at last with the full roar and fury of a winter storm.

Again Squam laid his violin in his lap and looked out dreamily through the fading light. A change in the contour of the ground fifty yards away arrested his eye. He looked more closely. Jerias, motionless, sat watching him, his long muzzle thrust tensely forward.

" 'Low ye're the rascal 'at ruint my cunner net," Squam called good-humoredly; then bent forward to watch as Jerias wheeled suddenly to two other foxes that came in view.



IT WAS warm and still in the dense spruce thicket where the big silver slept out the day, his sharp muzzle covered by his bushy tail. At times his body twitched painfully. Once he woke to search inquiringly with distended nostrils for the scent of his mate. Waking, however, he forgot the subconscious yearning and composed himself again to sleep. A wood-mouse stole between the close-growing spruce trunks, glimpsed the silver fur and scuttled fearfully away; a squirrel scolded from a safe elevation; a chicadee approached dangerously near in irresistible curiosity, then flew hastily upward. Even in his sleep Jerias knew and classified these happenings but they were not of sufficient importance to wake him.

Finally, when the day was nearly spent, he opened his eyes, rose to his feet, and stretched with a great yawn. He was hungry and went instinctively toward the place he had found food the night before. His sharp ears told him that Squam was stirring inside the house and he gave it a wide berth. The laths nailed across the bottom of the staging baffled him. He scratched and gnawed at them but to no avail. Then he saw the hammer and can of nails. This was something new, something that held a hated scent yet was not dangerous. He picked up the hammer in his long jaws and, trotting quickly, carried it to the spot where he had taken the bright basin the night before and covered it with leaves. Then he went back for the can of nails. Half way to the house, however, he froze to the ground in fear. The most horrible and sinister sounds were coming from the thing sitting on the doorstep!

Jerias listened through the first two numbers. Then, at the staccato of the hornpipe, rage possessed him. He growled deep in his throat and the ruff around his neck rose upright. Walking very stiffly on the tips of his toes he drew nearer. The hornpipe ended and Ezra played "Old Zeb Coon." It did not affect the fox as had the sharps of the previous selection. He sat down to consider this new sound. Finally the violin spoke of the sea, calm, rough, then raging in the clutch of tempest. Something awoke in Jerias. Perhaps it was the memory of the roaring Alaska winds that came back to him through the strings—perhaps a special nerve center reacted to the long drawn out notes. His body stiffened, he leaned forward in tense excitement.

Jerias saw the other two foxes even before Squam. They were the Siberian blue and his mate. The dog-fox barked threateningly. He was in the throes of courtship and anxious to impress his lady. Jerias did not move out of the way. Instead he stood high on his toes and growled. The two males circled, rose on their hind legs like fighting dogs, growling furiously. The Siberian blue was slimmer in build with a longer muzzle but not so heavy as the silver. The combat was of brief duration. Jerias upset his antagonist, missed the death grip on his throat, and the other fox twisted free and fled.

The vixen had watched the fight with untroubled eyes. Such were the courting customs of her wooers and she was always ready to reward the victor with her love. Mincingly she sidled up to Jerias, whimpering alluringly. The big silver paid no attention to her. She approached a coy muzzle. Jerias snarled warningly, turned, and melted into the gathering darkness.

"By king!" Ezra said aloud, rising from the doorstep to peer after him, "by king! Guess he ain't forgit his own missus yet! No, not by a ding sight!"

IV

THE petals of the May flowers mutated from green into dazzling white; Ladies' Delight shone star-like in the new grass; blueberry bushes put out their leaves, and the spruce cones opened.

Squam had already sunk the anchors. Now he took the big net, sixty-five by eighty-five feet, and set it, placing the thirty by thirty pocket on the side to the shore. It was a tremendous task for one man, but the fisherman enjoyed using his great strength.

By the time the first wild tiger lily bloomed there was another litter of young foxes at the base of the sandy cliff behind the barn. Squam suspected the Siberian blue of also having a family hidden away. The foxes had become a decided nuisance. A dory load of big flounders, speared at low tide and put in two barrels one evening to ripen for lobster bait, was scattered all over the island next morning. And the barrels had been closed with boards, weighted down

by heavy rocks! Any object left outside the house was sure to be carried away during the night. Some things Squam picked up afterward in the woods, others disappeared permanently. He suspected Jerias of being the principal thief. The big silver was the only fox that approached the house in daylight. Apparently he had not mated and obviously the other foxes feared him.

Nevertheless the big fisherman rather liked Jerias—at first. Every evening when he played his violin on the doorstep the fox came to the same spot and listened. Squam learned to expect him, once even waited until he appeared before beginning to play. Then something happened that completely changed his feelings.

That day began badly. The spark plug on Squam's engine cracked just as he was setting out for the mainland with his lobsters. He went back ashore to get another, his pliers in his hand, and laid them on the doorstep. As he came out of the house Jerias jumped from under his feet, the pliers in his jaws. Squam flung the spark plug at him and followed it with everything he could lay his hands on. The big fox stood perfectly still and calmly dodged rocks, two lobster buoys, and a hatchet. Then he finally dropped the pliers and trotted unconcernedly away.

At the fishing village on the mainland Squam missed the lobster smack and faced the necessity of taking his lobsters back to the island to wait for the next week. Also he got into a fight. A new fisherman had settled in the village and, unacquainted with Squam's prowess, chose to take offence at a surly answer. Two minutes later he was lying, half stunned, in the shallow water near shore.

Squam bought and paid for his supplies and went back to the island. His nerves were raw from loss of temper. It was well on in the afternoon and the prospect of his usual tasks filled him with distaste. He sat morosely on the doorstep for a half hour, then, seeking the only balm he knew, picked up his violin and climbed the high hill to the north of the island.

It was a beautiful summer day and as the big man settled down among the blueberry bushes, his back against a rock, he felt better. Lovingly he tucked the violin under his chin and let the bow wander. Habit is hard to break, however, and he played through the "Arkansas Traveler," then went into the "Flower of Edinboro," the next of his pieces. Half through the selection he had the feeling of some one near him. Glancing over his shoulder he spied Jerias crouched in the bushes not a dozen yards away.

Squam laid down his violin and stared at the animal. Jerias remained absolutely motionless, his expressionless eyes steadily on the man.

"By king!" the big fisherman exclaimed with a glow of pleasure, "By king! Like music, do ye? Wa-al, ain't no law agin it 'at I know uv. Here's a kickety one fer ye," and he broke into "Fisher's Hornpipe."

At the first staccato notes Jerias' whole attitude underwent a change. His body half rose from the ground, his eyes blazed, and his lips drew back from his teeth in rage. Squam, with a quick premonition that the fox was going to jump on him, scrambled to his feet. Jerias sprang back and sped down the hill, looking over his shoulder with an ugly snarl.

"Ye danged thing, ye gormy thing!" the man exclaimed furiously, "I set an' play fer ye an' ye go fer ter bite me! Ye're—ye're a *thing!*"

Squam put his violin under his arm and walked down the hill. That evening when he played Jerias came back to his usual place. The fisherman heaved a rock at him. The fox dodged it easily, moved ten yards farther away and sat down again.

"Stay thar, then, dang ye," the man said, and played out his repertoire.

It was not the same as the other evenings, though. The musician's vanity had been sorely wounded.

THE first evening on Gull Island had shaped Jerias' habits—and animals acquire habits more easily, and break away from them with infinitely more difficulty, than man. The violin was both a torture and a delight—a torture when it rasped his nerves with the staccato notes of the hornpipe; a delight when it spoke of the sea; an ecstasy when it reproduced gales and winter wind.

Though the memory of the little vixen who had escaped on the mainland had long faded he did not take another mate. Without family cares he had plenty of time to forage for himself and grow fat. Systematically he thrashed every male that dared

to stand up to him till they fled at the first sniff of his approach.

The schedule of his activities began with the evening concert. He never failed to come and listen, always sitting at the same spot unless driven away, and even then remaining within hearing of the violin. Though he recognized in Squam a power for his destruction, it was not with a definite fear—his contact with men had been too slight for this to develop.

After the light went out in the house Jerias foraged and drank; then roamed about the island looking for trouble. As did all the other foxes, he stole, picking up any object that interested him, playing with it, then scratching leaves and dirt over it beneath the big oak tree. As the summer went on he had built in this fashion a respectable pyramid.

If Jerias was unhappy he did not know it. That he was actually happy is to be doubted save when he listened to Ezra's last improvisation—after paying for it by the agony of the hornpipe.

V.

SUMMER waned. The ruby pendants of the blueberry bushes swelled to azure globes; raspberries were long gone; blackberries ripened, and in the marshy places cranberries spread green spheres suffused with crimson. The sober slate-colored gulls of the year had joined their richer garbed white and gray parents; the mackerel had gone; white winged coots, black duck, and high flying flocks—all males—of the harlequin-clad wood duck had come. The day after Squam took in his net for the season, a long, honking wedge of geese streamed across the sky. That night there was a hard frost that clothed maple and poplar in scarlet and gold.

One letter had come from Mr. Emerson during the fall. The storekeeper read it to Squam—its contents thus becoming public property. It dwelt on the value of the foxes and inclosed a check to buy food for them during the winter. Squam privately considered that Emerson had been deceived as to his charges' value—no pelt could possibly be worth a thousand dollars. He made no comment, however, but cashed the check at the store and went his way.

The first fall of snow showed him that the rabbits, which had formerly left their tracks everywhere, were all but gone. He spread fish for the foxes until the weather became too severe to set trawl, then purchased several barrels of meat scraps on his monthly trip to the mainland.

Finally the cold began in dead earnest. The island was deep in snow, the shores piled high with ice. Lobsters had gone to twenty-fathom water and Squam's traps were set from a mile to three miles off shore.

The foxes had grown their winter coats and Squam marveled at the change. Jerias looked twice as big as he had during the summer and was a thing of beauty even to the untutored eyes of the fisherman. Some of the foxes had dens beneath the barn, others stuck to the holes in the steep sand bank or found caves in the rocks. Squam located all but one—Jerias. Where the big silver slept he never found out.

Winter troubled the hermit of Gull Island very little. He hauled his traps whenever the weather permitted, and it took a rough sea indeed to daunt him. There were the trees which he had ringed during the summer to be cut for cordwood, gear to be gone over and, when these tasks failed, he knitted trap heads for which there was a market among the fishermen too lazy to provide them for themselves.

And always in the evenings there was his violin. He played it in the kitchen, at first seated by the stove. Then, one evening, he glimpsed a shadow outside the window and went quickly to the door. Jerias was prowling ten yards away. After that he played by the window through which he could see, on moonlit nights, the fox seated on the snow listening.

"Guess he'd like fer ter take a chaw outer me," he told himself grimly, but nevertheless, he derived a sense of companionship from the presence of Jerias, no less real because unacknowledged.

It was a bitterly hard winter with more wind than snow. The boats could go out seldom and lobster pots, even in deep water, were smashed or, what was equivalent to losing them, the buoys torn from the warp. Lobster prices rose from sixty cents a pound to eighty, then touched ninety. Squam, with his contempt for all but impossible weather, profited accordingly. The mainland fishermen, less provident and much lazier, nearly starved.

The first Monday in February Squam

crossed to the mainland. There was a letter from Mr. Emerson directing that the five adult male silvers be killed and their pelts sent on to him, before the first of April.

"Some costly, them foxes," the storekeeper commented enviously when he had finished the letter, "'Low Mr. Emerson makes a lot out uv 'em. Hope he pays ye right well. He does, don't he?"

Squam grunted noncommittally.

"You send him a post card sayin' I got his letter," he said. "Here's a cent, and here's the three-sixty fer the tradin' I done 'ith ye."

"Furst cash I seen fer a long time," the storekeeper laughed. "Ye got a lot uv it over thar on the island, I guess."

Squam, without answering, went down to his boat. It was growing late and he wanted to be back to play his violin before it was time to go to bed.

By the middle of February four of the five silver males had been caught. Squam stretched their shining pelts on frames which he swung from cords above the bed in the cold room where he slept. Then began the real struggle. He could not catch the fifth male, and that male was Jerias. The big silver never came near the box trap in which the fisherman had captured the others. Then he tried two padded steel traps concealed as cleverly as he knew. They caught the other foxes, but Jerias contemptuously scratched refuse over them. Changing their location brought no better result. In desperation Squam thought of shooting the fox, but regretfully abandoned the idea for fear of spoiling the skin. It would have been easy to do so when Jerias came to the evening concerts.

The morning of the first Monday in March, Squam's day to meet the lobster smack at the mainland, a tide-walker smashed up through the bottom of his dory at her mooring. He hauled her in with difficulty, since the water-logged piece of piling still hung in her, and turned her upside down for temporary repairs so that he could get out to his boat moored further off shore. There was a rustle behind him and he turned just in time to see Jerias making off with his bailer.

"Guess 'at 'all be 'baout all I c'n stand f'om ye," Squam said angrily and started in pursuit. The fox outdistanced him but the fisherman slogged steadily on its trail. Less than a quarter of a mile from the house he found the bailer half buried in the snow. Kicking it free his foot struck something else and, bending down, he uncovered the long lost tin basin, an empty tomato can, broken laths—all the treasures that Jerias had secreted.

"By king!" the man exclaimed in wonder, and stood looking down at the heap of miscellaneous articles, "By king!"

An inspiration came to him. He threw the bailer to one side and then carefully replaced everything else, kicking snow over the pile. Then he got the two steel traps and set them just beneath the snow side by side on top of the mound beneath the oak tree.

The dory repaired sufficiently to take him out to his boat, Squam started his engine and headed for the mainland. The tail end of a norther was still blowing. Canvas covering, boat, engine and Squam himself were quickly white beneath a coating of ice.

The lobster smack had not arrived and he waited all afternoon at the store. At seven o'clock a telephone call came from Portland that the buyer would arrive early next morning—and was paying ninety-four cents. The store-keeper offered Squam a bed for the night. The norther had blown itself out but there was still a heavy sea and it was very dark. The fisherman hesitated but finally accepted.

JERIAS, his nose in his bushy tail, slept out the day quietly in the spruce thicket. The cold did not bother him; his marvelous glittering coat kept him perfectly warm. Nor did his body twitch with subconscious memory of the man's pursuit. He was used to being chased by Squam, even enjoyed it. On this occasion he had doubled back and watched the unearthing of his treasures. Even this caused him no annoyance. It had been the pleasure of garnering—as with the man it was the work that counted more than the bank account at Portland—and he did not care in the least when Squam walked away with his latest acquisition, the dory bailer. The setting of the traps annoyed him. He had no use for traps. Other foxes were continually getting into them and making fear-noises.

With the early darkness the big silver awoke, stretched, and went hunting. There were still a few rabbits left on the island. Before full dark there was one less.

Hunger and thirst satisfied he prowled about rather aimlessly, sniffing long at the tracks of the Siberian blue female. There was a restlessness in him the last few days that he could not understand, a softness and with it a longing for combat, furious combat.

At eight o'clock he trotted soberly and in a business-like manner down to the house as was his custom. There was no light. Jerias sat down in the snow and waited for the sounds that first enraged, then caused him such poignant delight. Nothing annoys an animal, as well as a human, so much as a break in routine. Jerias waited for hours, growing momentarily more impatient and disturbed. Finally he approached the house. His nose at close quarters told him instantly that the man was not there. He went to the barn and looked for him. Then he went down to the shore. Finally he trotted off to the treasure heap under the oak tree where he had seen him last.

A steady put-put came from the darkness of the sea, broke to uncertain coughings as the engine fired badly. Jerias knew the sound. It meant that the man was coming back, perhaps with some of that delicious food he scattered broadcast. The fox glided down to the shore, caught a glimpse of an approaching boat, then slunk into the shadow of the barn to watch. From the darkness came the splash-splash-splash of water being baled from the damaged dory.

"I can't see my hand afore my face," a voice complained.

"Don't ye use 'at flash," another voice warned.

"——! It's darker'n all git out an' three miles back ter shore," the first speaker objected. "How c'n I put a p'int in 'at rockerarm 'ithout a light, I'd like ter know?"

"Take it inter the house 'ith ye," his companion directed. "C'm on, this dory is all stove up an' leakin' like all git out."

The two men rowed ashore and stole up to the house. Though they knew that its owner was three miles away with the tide rips between they moved cautiously, even fearfully, paused often to listen. One of them stumbled, cursed.

"What's c'm ter ye?" the other whispered angrily.

"I dropped 'at rocker-arm, consarn it!"

For ten minutes the two men groped about in the snow. A rocker-arm, though it is but a two-inch piece of metal, is as essential to a fisherman's engine as gasoline itself—without it the spark will not jump.

"I gotter use 'at flash," insisted the smaller of the two men.

"Yes, I guess we gotter use 'at flash," the other agreed regretfully, "We'll git 'em skins fu'st an' 'en look fer 'at rocker-arm. Consarn ye fer a clumsy fool ter drop it!"

The smaller man accepted the rebuke in silence and they approached the house, tried the door. It opened and they passed inside.

Jerias came out of the shadow of the barn and cautiously sniffed at their tracks, followed to where they had hesitated. Something bright caught his eye, a little piece of metal in the shape of an L. He picked it up and turned in the direction of his treasure pile, then changed his mind as the door of the house opened, and withdrew back to the shadow of the barn.

"Wa-al, I guess we got 'em," the larger of the two men said jubilantly, "I guess I'll larn him ter slap a feller crossways. I'll put 'em in the dory whilst ye pick up 'at rocker-arm."

"Ye'll stay here 'ith me," his companion said fiercely, "I don't trust ye nohow 'ith 'em skins—knowin' ye as I do."

"Couldn't git 'way 'ithout 'at rocker-arm," the other man chuckled, "Ef I c'd I ain't sayin'. Le's see 'at flash," and he laid the four silver fox skins on the snow.

Twenty minutes later, when he spoke again, his voice was not entirely steady:

"Ain't no use wastin' time here. I seen some big nails an' a hatchet in the house. We'll make us a rocker-arm in ten minutes."

"I'm some scared," his companion's teeth were chattering, "C'm on, hurry!"

"There ye air! Jes' good as a boughten one," the smaller man said proudly half an hour later, as he held up his handiwork. "C'm on! Ye left the skins outside," and he turned to the door.

It opened wide and Ezra Squam stood looking at them.

SQUAM moved restlessly about the little room that he owed to the hospitality of the storekeeper. He had gone to bed at nine o'clock but sleep would not come. It was the first time in ten years that he had spent a night away from Gull Island and he heartily wished himself back there It was foolish of him to have stayed, he told himself. The fire would go out and leave the

house cold; there was the trap for Jerias to be looked at; and—and the skins! A cold shiver ran over him. Suppose some one should steal them!

He went to the window that looked out upon the water. It was very dark and he could not, at first, make out the Hampton boats that were moored there. Suppose some one actually took the skins! He'd have to pay for them. Mr. Emerson was a hard man— He picked out the outline of a boat, another, a third, as he looked steadily where he knew each one should be. It was some dark! His eyes found the fourth, the fifth. That was all. No, there were six boats since that highlander, the new fisherman, had come to the village. Squam strained his eyes into the darkness to where it should be moored. There was no boat there!

The man's thoughts were tumbling over one another as he hauled in a dory, found the thole pins in the dark, and fitted them into their holes. He'd take the first boat he came to. But suppose there was no gasoline in the tank, that the engine was out of order. No, it would be better to row out to Gull Island so that he could approach quietly. He bent to the oars.

The dory rounded the point of rock that made the harbor for the village and hid it from the island. Squam glanced over his shoulder towards his home and his heart went into his mouth. It seemed to him that he had seen a point of light flash for a moment in the darkness. He looked again but there was nothing. Lengthening his strokes he drove the dory over the rough sea, putting all he had into his rowing.

After what seemed to the toiling man a century of effort Gull Island loomed from the darkness. He shortened his stroke, glanced about him. Where was his dory? Perhaps it had filled and sunk so that the gunwales were level with the water? Then he spied the strange boat at his own mooring.

Squam let the dory slide up on the sandy beach, dropped the oars and leaped to land. On the way to the house he hesitated at a black blotch on the snow, put his hand down to it, then strode on. Light was streaming from a window and just at the edge of the radiance he made out the seated figure of Jerias holding something in his jaws.

Squam slipped off his heavy coat and let it fall on the snow, rolled up his sleeves over his tremendous arms, and flung open the door.

"We—we wuz kinder 'spectin' ye, Ez—yes, we wuz kinder 'spectin' ye," the smaller man's face was white. "We bruck a rocker-arm ter the east uv Gull Island an' come 'shore ter make 'nother. Here 'tis ter show I'm speakin' God's truth," and he held up the piece of metal.

"I found 'em skins," Squam said in a voice so low that it was nearly a whisper, and struck like lightning at the other man who was edging towards the window.

It was a long fight. Once Squam tripped and fell, but managed to drag down both his antagonists with him. Once the smaller man caught him a stunning blow on the temple with a hard stick of oak snatched from the woodbox, but Squam only shook his head and plunged forward upon him. A chair went to smash, the table with its dishes crashed to the floor. At last the larger man succeeded in freeing himself for a moment and reached the door, but Squam caught him by the belt, swung him from his feet, his head struck the stove and he lay still upon the floor. That was the end of it. In five minutes the two thieves, bruised, bleeding, only half conscious, lay bound, their wrists and ankles tied with six-thread warp.

With the fog of fighting still on him and his head aching furiously, Ezra went out to get the skins. Jerias was sitting in the same spot. The man made a furious rush at him and the fox melted into the darkness.

Back in the house, Squam took the lamp from its shelf and replaced the pelts in his bedroom. Then he returned to the kitchen, sat down on a chair and glowered silently at his prisoners.

It was the smaller of the two men who finally spoke—

"Ye ain't goin' ter give me over ter the law, be ye, Ez?"

Squam remained silent.

"'T wan't me planned it," he pleaded, "'T wuz 'at highlander. Thar ain't a mite uv flour ter home, an' the store shut down on me last week."

Squam made no comment.

"I got six kids, Ez, ter do fer—an' Uncle Jerias 'sides. Ye ain't goin' fer ter give me over ter the law, be ye?" the voice whined.

Squam had no intention of giving them over to the law. He knew nothing about the law, distrusted it. As a matter of fact he didn't know what to do with the men. A supreme distaste for their presence came

over him. He wanted Gull Island to himself, he wanted to sweep his house clean from them, resume his usual life, go out and look at the trap he had set for Jerias.

Suddenly he rose to his feet, drew out his knife and, opening it, bent down.

"My God, ye don't aim ter kill us?" the smaller man screamed.

Squam paid no attention to him but cut his companion's bonds.

"Here's yer rocker-arm," he said quietly, picking it up from beneath the wreck of the table, "Ye c'n go—go back ter the place ye c'm f'om. Ye ain't wanted in these parts."

"Git the money fer my lobsters when the smack comes in, an' bring back my bo-at," he directed as he freed the other. "Ye c'n row back in the dory I come in."

From the beach Squam watched the boat fade into the distance. The clouds had broken and moonlight flooded over the rapidly calming sea. Walking in a trance he went back to the house and sat down on a chair, contemplating the wreck about him with unseeing eyes. The lamp sputtered, and went out. For a long time Squam sat in the darkness, then rose and lighted a lantern. He felt that he ought to go to bed, but he had no desire for sleep. Had they really left the island? He went to the door and looked out into the moonlight. Unconsciously his eyes sought the place where Jerias sat. There was no fox there.

"Might 's well hev a look at 'at trap," he told himself, a distaste for the house upon him, and picking up his coat, he tramped away through the snow. His head had begun to ache abominably and the events of the evening kept marching through his brain with agonizing repetition. Those skins! If he could only get rid of them, be free from their responsibility!

There was something on the mound of snow beneath the oak tree. Squam raised his lantern higher. Jerias crouched motionless before him, a fore foot caught in each of the two traps.

"Wa-al, I got ye at las'," the man said, but his voice was flat, lacked exultation, "Yes, I got ye at last."

He looked about him for something to strike that one sharp blow—that blow which would mutate sentient loveliness into a dead symbol of wealth. The end of a stout oak lath protruded from the snow. Squam balanced it in his hand, shifted the lantern so that the light fell full on the fox's head. It showed bright, fearless eyes looking up at him steadily—it showed something else, what Jerias still held in his jaws. Ezra hesitated, bent down, jerked it from between his teeth, raised the lantern. It was a rocker-arm, the point worn away!

A twinge of pain went through the man's head and he staggered slightly. Then the sequence of events from the time he had left the mainland to the recovery of the skins marched again through his brain. Unconsciously he spoke aloud:

"'At's their rocker-arm. Jerias stole it—I don't know how he stole it but he did—'at's how they come not ter get 'way afore I ketched 'em, yes, 'at's how they come not ter get 'way!"

He looked down at Jerias. The fox met his eyes unflinchingly.

"I'd hev lost 'em skins ef it hadn't been fer ye," he said, then argued on the other side, "Ye tried fer ter bite me onct, yes, ye tried fer ter bite me!"

He breathed heavily, repeated:

"Ye tried fer ter bite me onct, so ye did," but his voice was uncertain. Again he sought the fox's eyes which held his own steadily. There was a long silence. Then it was shattered by a hysteria of words:

"By king, I ain't goin' fer ter kill ye, no I ain't! By king, I ain't! I'm—"

He tore off his coat, dropped to his knees and twisted it about the fox's head. Then he released the two imprisoned fore feet, gathered Jerias up in his arms and ran clumsily down to the shore.

For an hour Squam pulled steadily, then rested on his oars just off the point of rock that formed the harbor for the village. He shook his head as though in answer to a question, guided the dory along the outside of the point close to the rocks. Bending down suddenly, he untwisted the coat, caught up Jerias by the scruff of the neck, and, with a swing of a mighty arm, tossed him to the shore.

The light was breaking when Ezra Squam staggered into the little house on Gull Island and peered wearily about him. The violin was safe on its shelf above the wreck of the table. He reached for it, drew a chair to the window and sat down. With his tired eyes fixed on the spot where Jerias had sat for so many evenings the fisherman drew the bow across the strings. "The Flower of Edinboro" followed the "Arkansas Traveler," then Squam played the first bar of Fisher's

Hornpipe, stopped. Somehow that piece didn't sound right, he didn't want to play it— The violin spoke of the sea, roared out a winter storm. The bow began to move more slowly. Perhaps the storm was blowing itself out? More slowly still—then silence!

Ezra's head nodded forward on his breast. He slept, peacefully, deeply, and in the shadow of his dream all the birds seemed singing of the spring.

VI

JERIAS landed on his feet, jumped from the hungry maw of an overcurving wave and sat down facing the sea. The thing that had brought him there was going away over the water. Jerias barked inquiringly, then whimpered. This was a strange place to which he had been brought and he did not like it. The thing on the water was nearly out of sight. Jerias whimpered again and ran up and down the rocks.

Suddenly he felt that something was looking at him, that he was bare for all the world to see. His eyes hunted cover. There was none!

The fox crouched close to the ground now, motionless. Above him rose a great hill, with here and there scattered stands of green spruce. A vague memory stirred in Jerias. He had known something like that—long ago in the dim past. He slid forward, a swift shadow across the snow. The hill came nearer, as things did when one ran towards them. There was cover ahead.

The big silver fox threaded among fallen, half burnt timber, his feet instinctively finding the way beneath the snow. He came at last in the shadow of the trees.

Jerias paused and sniffed. There was a familiar taint to the air. His neck ruff bristled. High on his toes he stalked on, found a track. He sniffed again, then launched forward. There was a big red fox facing him, fangs bared.

The fight was brief. Jerias barked triumphantly after his fleeing opponent, then wheeled like a flash. What was that shadow on the snow? Yes, it was another fox!

But this time the silver's ruff did not rise, his teeth remained covered. Something was waking in him. There was a different scent to the air, something he knew, something that had to do with great happiness. He whimpered and drew nearer. The shadow moved slowly away, paused enticingly. Jerias followed. Again the shadow moved; again Jerias pursued.

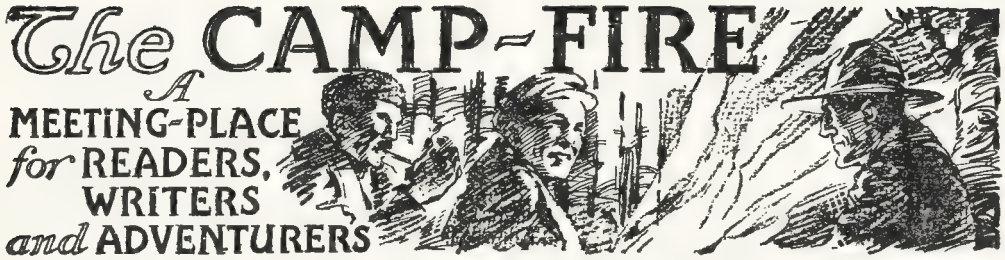
The little wind that heralds morning whispered a soft violin note through the tops of the trees. Jerias paused expectant. There should follow sounds that woke him to rage; then sounds that were an esctasy.

The little silver-gray vixen moved into a patch of light and barked impatiently. Jerias jumped as though waking from a dream, wheeled to her. She whimpered again ingratiatingly.

Something died in Jerias, and, at the same time, something awoke. He forgot the sound of the violin, forgot all that had come between, in the moment that he knew his lost mate.

A chicadee roused and sang his few simple notes in brave hopefulness of spring. Jerias barked joyously and sprang forward. The little silver vixen let him reach her side; then went deeper into the wood, glancing coquettishly over her shoulder.

Jerias followed.



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

AS ALREADY stated, there were so many letters and inquiries concerning snakes, snake-bites, and Gila monsters that there wasn't room for more than a small part of them in "Camp-Fire." That was too bad but it couldn't be helped. The next best thing was to pass them all over to Dr. G. K. Noble of the American Museum of Natural History, our "Ask Adventure" expert on herpetology. Dr. Noble has gone over all of them and is covering their queries in two talks at "Camp-Fire." This time he deals with snake-bite and treatment. It is good to have these matters straightened out for us by so widely recognized an authority.

Snake-Bite and Treatment

From the point of view of sentiment, the value of a human life is inestimable. But from the point of view of economics, the loss of human life in this country due to snakes is insignificant beside the benefits received by farmers from snakes. There are comparatively few records of death directly attributable to reptiles. Even those are most frequently found in zoos, museums and circuses. Death from blood-poisoning is frequently the *indirect* result of snake-bite. Out of one hundred and fifteen species found in the United States less than twenty are poisonous in any degree. The diamond-back rattler and the Texas rattler are the only ones whose bite is dangerous, even in the face of prompt and efficient treatment. I do not mean to give the impression that one can afford to be reckless in the handling of snakes. But it is true that much needless horror and many strange tales of miraculous recoveries have resulted from snake-bites which were as harmless as mosquito-bites.

THE poisonous snakes of the United States are divided into three main groups. The first, including several small, rare snakes hardly worthy of consideration, have teeth in the *rear* of the upper jaw grooved to conduct poison from the sac to the wound. The poison is active, but the fangs are too far back to pierce large prey. Fangs, it should always be stated, are teeth and not forked tongues.

The second group is represented in America only by the small coral snake. Here the *front* teeth of the upper jaw have grooves for the flow of poison. The poison is extremely virulent, more so than that of the rattler, but the snake on account of its small size and burrowing habits is seldom dangerous to man, as is its better equipped foreign cousin, the cobra. The poison of this group attacks the nerve centers, causing death by suffocation, due to the failure of the heart and lungs to function.

In the third group, including rattlers, copperheads and moccasins, the poison fangs are highly developed. When the mouth is closed, the fangs (the two front teeth of the upper jaw) lie folded back against the roof of the mouth. When the mouth is open, the fangs are automatically extended almost to right angles with the jaw. They are structurally like hypodermic needles and are fed through a small duct leading to the poison sac. This poison breaks down the capillaries and causes death through internal hemorrhages.

Every one who frequents snake-infested country should familiarize himself with the poisonous varieties. He should wear long sleeves and heavy leggings, for over ninety per cent. of all snake-bites are received in the arms and legs. And he should provide himself with a hypodermic syringe and a concentrated solution of potassium permanganate.

THE first step in the treatment of snake-bite is to check the circulation and prevent the spread of poison throughout the system. This is done by tightly binding the arm or leg just above the wound. The ligature should not remain in place for more than thirty minutes, through danger of gangrene.

The second step is to *remove* as much of the poison as possible by means of sucking and rubbing. Slashing with a knife is not advised nowadays. The danger of infection overbalances the possible good.

The third step is to *destroy* the remaining venom by oxidation with the permanganate, which is injected with the syringe directly into the wound. Rattlesnake serum can now be purchased at various centers and may be effective even a day or so after the bite.

Whisky never was a cure for snake-bite, nor are the vast array of external applications only too often prescribed.

The Gila monster is the only poisonous lizard in the world. The chuckwalla, though reputed to be poisonous at certain times of the year, is entirely harmless. The bite of the Gila monster is not as effective as that of the rattler but can produce severe illness and pain. Several cases of death are on record but have never been carefully examined. Treatment should be the same as that for snake-bite.

GREAT interest is always attached to the handling of poisonous snakes in the Hopi Indian snake-dance. Great numbers of rattlesnakes figure prominently in this ceremony but there are virtually no records of accidents. Several explanations are given for this, the most important being that the snake-priests know how to handle the creatures and divert their attention from the performers. It is possible to empty the sac of its poison by letting a snake bite on a stick or a piece of cloth. This is not effective for long, however, as the sac may be filled again within a few hours. Extracting the fangs also has its disadvantages. New fangs are always concealed like cartridges in the jaw, ready to grow out as soon as freed. The snake would only be disabled for a day or two. The snake-priests use all these methods but they have no one absolute protection.

One of the Camp-Fire readers has asked if an angry snake could cause ill-effects such as those caused by a mad dog. The so-called "mad dog" is merely a victim of the well known disease of hydrophobia or rabies. Snakes are not subject to this disease and a mad snake could do no more harm than one which was only vivacious.—G. K. NOBLE.

THE sign language. Ethmologists, how about this? Uncle Frank Huston, who lived among the Indians, says you've overlooked an important distinction. Don't forget, in considering the matter, that Uncle Frank is the one member of Camp-Fire who's privileged to lambast any of us over the head now and then.

San Diego, California.

It is a striking commentary on the mental attitude of the troops who operated in Indian country that I have never encountered an "Indian War Veteran" who knew anything of sign language nor yet more than a few exceptional enlisted men and officers who knew even a few words of the Aborigines' language. I was fortunate in having a friend who was interested in hand-talk and was able to assist him in obtaining data that he incorporated in a work on the subject later, but he was an exception.

About the time the book was published—1880, I think—a shavetail came West and took up the study with considerable enthusiasm, but his studies were mainly from print, the practise of so communicating being well along the start of its decadence. Today it is pitiful to see the few aborted signs used by a few aged reservation Indians as it is to witness this really efficient retired general passing as "the greatest living authority" on the subject. His knowledge of it is such that twenty years ago I told him to "Go to ——" in a sign that was universally recognized on the plains sixty years ago *and he did not even recognize it.* Strange, I have seen it used by children in the South "befo' the wah" simple, just the end of the thumb protruding between the knuckles of the index and second fingers of the double fist, the hand thrust briskly and derisively toward the party addressed. This sign made to an old-time Indian meant more than *fight;* kill or be killed was the result and no medium course.

I HAVE met a few Smithsonian "bug sharps," have read right smart of their brilliant fiction, but have yet to see where, if ever, they noticed that many signs as well as words were peculiar to the sexes. Men had certain words and signs used only in addressing other men, also other signs used only in speaking to women, while the women had an even greater number of words and signs used only to and among their own sex and a lesser number in addressing men.

I have been told by observant travelers, *not ethnologists,* that a similar practise exists among primitives in many widely dispersed parts of the world.

The tendency of the ologist of any brand or breed is to become like the party of emigrants trudging along the banks of the Rio Grande and perishing of thirst. When rescued and asked why they did not quench their thirst from the river, they answered, astonished at the futility of the query, "Why! How could we? We didn't have no cup!"

BUT your right hand, fingers slightly relaxed (apart and bent), palm to front, alongside face a few inches from cheek and about level with eye. Turn it by wrist motion right and left several times. This is generic for "Question?" "What?" Interrogation.

Hold your left hand back from you, or with palm down, fingers extended, touch the back lightly with tips of fingers of right hand.

Then hold closed fist in front of mouth and snap index out along ball of thumb directly to front. (*i. e.* talk).

With these motions you have asked, "Do you speak the sign language?"

To tell you do: instead of the sign of "What," double fist, thumb extended, and strike your breast with side of thumb, thus making the sign for "Me," "I," "Mine." Point to a person for "You"—"He"—"She"—etc.

"Yes" is made by holding loosely double fist, same position (about) as for "Question," back to rear and index erect but slightly curved forward. Move hand by wrist action slightly forward, down and back again, imitating thus a person gravely bowing affirmation, the index representing the person.

ONCE in a hospital I showed the Surg. in charge a few signs, and soon the doctors, nurses and attendants were going around like the inmates of a deaf and dumb asylum. It was a Wooo while it lasted.

Like spoken language the fundamentals are easily learned, but they and the basic principles, the shadings and phrasings, are as delicate and marked as in the choicest literature, and the speakers vary in their skill, in grace and flare, as individuals in all societies where the spoken or written words are used.

Some, like Major Clark, were as graceful as a swallow's wing, others, like our general referred to, remind one of a butcher splitting carcases in an abattoir.

I salaamed to Mundy once last fall the "Eastern" salute, hand to heart, lips and forehead. "Humm," he said. "One can see you are accustomed to sign language. In the East they do not do it as swiftly or as smoothly as that. Were they all as proficient as you?" and I answered him with his own expression: "Not knowing, can't say."—UNCLE FRANK.

HERE is one on us here in the office. We offer our apologies. Mr. Greene and Larry Barretto between them state the case:

Douglas, Arizona.

Have sent in a couple of words of appreciation once or twice, so now am going to raise a mild squawk.

I'VE enjoyed reading Mr. Barretto's ambulance stories very much, except for one thing—I am always afraid that one of his suspicious heroes will do something which will downright disgrace Section Five.

I believe I'm correct in saying that Section 5—646, as it is now called, was the most notable, in many ways, of any American section in France.

The outfit started at the first battle of the Marne, when several Americans resident in Paris went out as far as they could toward the lines and brought in what wounded they could to the city. Later it became something like the "Ambulance Harjes de Premiers Secours," a small mobile hospital unit, named after its angel, Morgan's Paris partner.

When I joined it in March, 1916, it was Section 5, of the American Red Cross, and attached to a division of the French Army at Verdun. The division in question was washed out, and Section 5 received its first army citation on the way toward the fourragère of the Medaille Militaire, which it finally won, the only American outfit to do so, if I am not mistaken.

IN 'SEVENTEEN the section was attached to the Division Brissaud of the Chasseurs, and was much praised officially. In August of that year, when our dear U. S. Government got what they seemed to fondly imagine was an army over there, and threatened to "militarize" the section, the old contemptibles hastily escaped, and joined either the Air Service or the Artillery of the French or American Armies. I never heard of an ambulance driver volunteering for the infantry.

Reorganized, and under American control, the old section, now known as 646, went on getting splattered with decorations, and ended up by being the first American outfit to dip its colors in the Rhine.

Perhaps I am extra touchy, but I shall be greatly surprised if you haven't received other communications in a vein similar to mine.

And one other thing, anent "An Impostor." I think it would be just about as easy for an outsider to pose as a "public school boy" to a real one, as it would be for a Sinn Feiner to get by as a 33rd degree Mason.—PAUL S. GREENE.

New York City.

My dear Mr. Greene: When I saw the first ambulance story in print in Paris I felt sure then that some one would write in asking why I particularly picked on Section 5. But I was really quite innocent. As you know, when the various outfits were taken over by the Government all the sections were renumbered and each set of numbers began with either 5 or 6; my outfit for example was 577. Well, in writing the stories I numbered the section, 5——, feeling that this made the outfit in mind sufficiently vague—there were so many sections. But an editor on *Adventure*, not knowing what I meant, cut out the dashes, and behold in print it appeared as if I were writing about old Section 5, later 646. All a mistake of course—I had no particular section in mind.

I know 646 very well. We were stationed near them for a while during the summer of 1918 in the village of Boursonne, or was it Betz? Anyway, near Villers-Cotterets.—LARRY BARRETTO.

THIS seems almost too good to be true. It's what they call "simply too delicious."

It's been a remarkably long time since any one has hopped on our magazine for being pro or anti any particular nation. (The usual ground for the charge

is, as you know, that in some story there is a hero of some particular nationality that the kicker doesn't happen to like, or a villain of his own nationality.) Well, the long dry spell is broken. Read this one:

St. Louis, Missouri.

In *Adventure* of August 10th you publish two stories, "Breed of the Wild Geese" and "The Bull Fight." If these two stories are not propaganda besides being drivel, then I have never read either. Isn't it nearly time you let up on British propaganda?—J. C. Borgstede.

ALL Irish readers to the front, please. No, not all of you, but all the anti-English Irish. Now, Irishmen, I leave it to you: Is printing a story with an Irishman as hero and entitling the story "Breed of the Wild Geese" what you would call pro-English propaganda?

I can hear your loud horse laugh and I have to take a hand in it myself. And while you're still standing would you mind giving Mr. Borgstede a bit of Irish history and explain to him that the "Wild Geese" were Irishmen who were driven out of Ireland by English persecution or left it voluntarily to escape English oppression? Thanks.

My thanks to Mr. Borgstede also. In citing those two stories against us he gives a very perfect example of our impartiality. One of them has a British hero, the other an anti-British hero. Not that we gave the point even a passing thought when we bought the two stories. We've never yet bought a story because some particular nationality figured in the rôle of hero or villain, though sometimes we've asked an author to change an English hero to an American for the simple reason that this is an American magazine and a majority of the readers are Americans. But, by his own rather odd method of reasoning, Mr. Borgstede's attack merely shows us absolutely and completely impartial.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Elmer Brown Mason rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. Like many others he has sat with us before joining our writers' brigade.

Mineola, New York.

It is an honor to stand up in such company on this, the occasion of the first story I have sold to *Adventure*. Some of you I know; one of you I met in Borneo many years ago; one, whose name is on the tablet (in *Adventure's* anteroom) of those who have hit the last trail, once did me more than a favor.

I USED to be an active member of your fraternity but the war rather put me out of the game for these last years—not to mention the years themselves. The only roaming I have done since 1918 consists of a swordfishing trip on a schooner to the banks, not a startling adventure but an extremely interesting experience.

In the past I have covered the world fairly well: Borneo, the *Sunderbund* in India, South America, Europe thoroughly, my own country in various capacities from timber cruiser to lecturer for the Bureau of Entomology on beetle damage in the South Atlantic and Gulf States. In those salad days I used to accumulate a stake, first from jobs, later from the writing of fiction, pick out the two places I wanted to go worst, and toss a coin between them. I remember one trip to Brazil where there was no limit to the poker game going down—table stakes. I came back on the same steamer several months later as assistant to the assistant's assistant deck steward. For a brief and inglorious period I was a general during an earnest but misplaced attempt to furnish a South American Republic with a better government. I do not cling to the title, however.

As to personal tastes, I like the woods, any woods in any country. I like all animals, wild or tame, with the exception of pug dogs and goldfish. I know a little about butterflies and beetles. I used to be a fair field shot with rifle and shotgun but German gas made that a "used to be." As to sports, all outdoor ones.

Perhaps the best thing in this best of all lives, now that I have given a hostage to fortune, is to read about what other younger men are doing and seeing in the places I have been. And these young men speak most vividly through the pages of *Adventure*.
—Elmer Brown Mason.

FROM Harold Lamb a word in connection with his three-part story beginning in this issue—something concerning the history that lies behind it:

Berkeley, California.

The expedition of the Cossacks to Urgench took place in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Abul Ghazi, sultan of the Uzbeks, gives a good account of it. He was alive at the time or, at any rate, heard the details from no less a personage than Arap Muhammad Khan himself, a remarkable chieftain and a dour fighter if ever there was one.

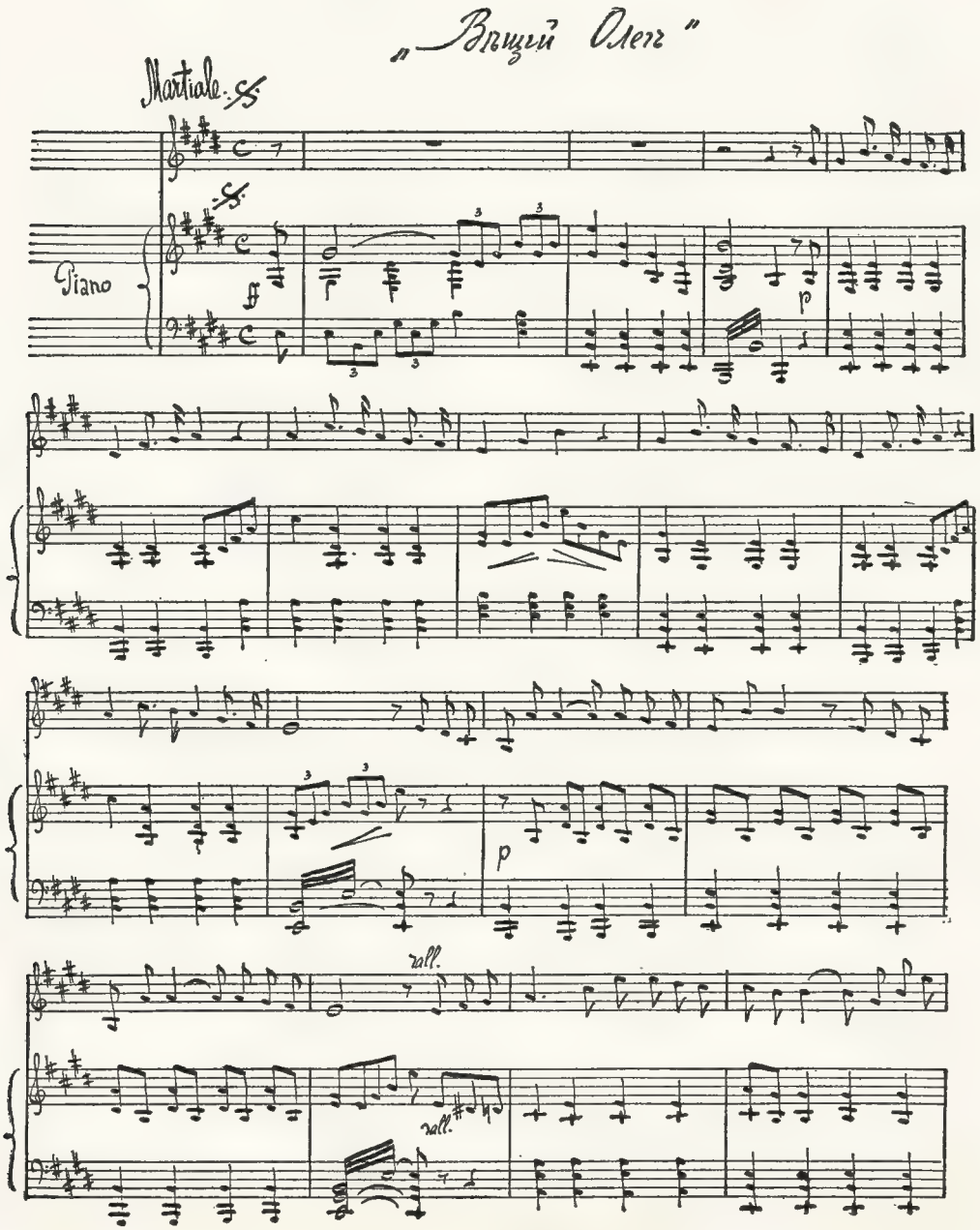
More than a hundred years later Peter the Great sent an expedition on the same mission, under command of Prince Becovitch-Cherkassi. Although four thousand strong, this little army was wiped out by the Turkomans, who executed the prince and sold most of his men into slavery.

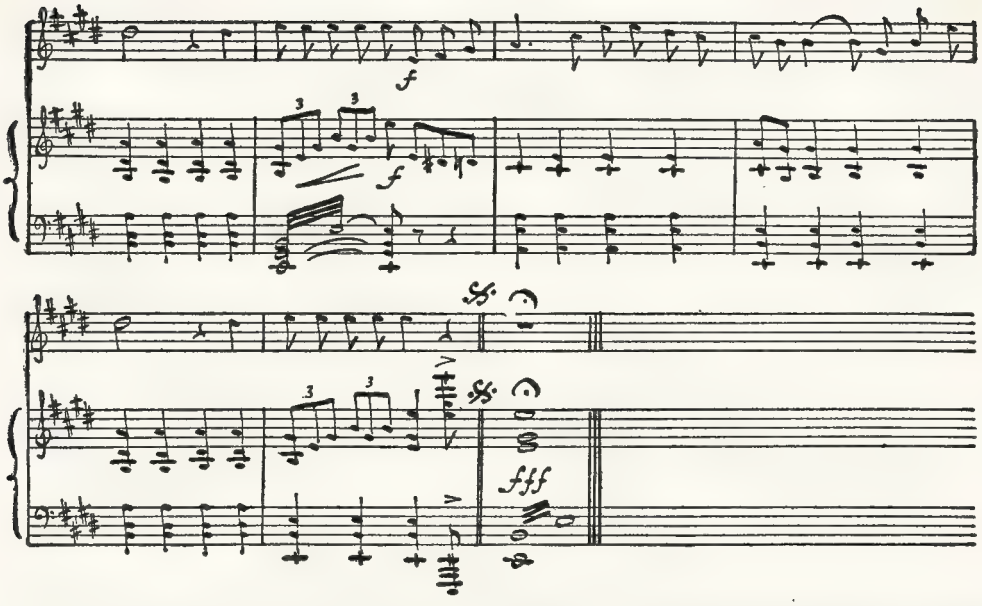
Probably only a Muscovite Tsar of the seventeenth century would have sent five hundred men to bring him the treasure of a Muhammadan city, in the very heart of the power of the sultans of Central Asia, beyond the salt deserts and the inland seas. I have tried to tell the story of these five hundred Cossacks.

"In 1602 five hundred Cossacks marched across the desert which divides the Caspian Sea from the Sea of Aral and took Urgenj, which is barely two days' march from Khiva.

"They returned with enormous booty, but were overtaken by the Khan of Khiva and the whole of their force was annihilated with the exception of only three Cossacks, who survived to convey the tidings of the disaster on the Jaick."—From "The Rival Powers in Central Asia," by Josef Popowski.

"Arap Mahamet Khan having taken the field to pass the summer with the lords, his vassals, upon the banks of the river Amu—the Urusses of Jaigik (Russians of Jaick) who were informed that there were no soldiers in summer in the town of Urgens, came there with a thousand men and after they had cut the throats of above a thousand of the inhabitants, they loaded about a thousand carts with all sorts of valuables and, having set fire to what they could not carry away, they returned.





"But Arap Mahamet being informed of it in time went to cut off their passage, and lay in wait for them at a certain defile, which he so well intrenched and palisaded in haste that the enemy could not force him till after an attack of two days and were obliged to leave all their booty behind.

"IN THE meantime Arap Mahamet Khan, who did not design to let them escape him so cheaply, having got the start of them, went to wait for them again at another defile; the Urusses not having been able to force this passage notwithstanding all the efforts they made to effect it; the water, which is very scarce in those parts, began at length to fail them, which reduced them to so great extremity that after having been obliged to drink the very blood of their slain companions to quench in some measure the thirst that had afflicted them, they were constrained to make a last effort to force the barricades of Arap Mahamet Khan.

"It succeeded so ill with them that there escaped scarce a hundred men of them who made over to the banks of the River Khisil (Red River) and there built a cabin a good way on the other side of the town of Tuk where they lived by fishing, waiting some favorable opportunity to reach their own country; but Arap Mahamet Khan having been informed, five days after, of the place of their abode, sent men there who slew them all."—From the "History of the Tatars," by Abul-ghazi Bahadur Khan.

The account of Abul-ghazi Bahadur Khan is interesting, as he was alive at the time—nephew, I think, to Arap Muhammad Khan, but his "thousands" are the usual Moslem historian's round figures.

I think the three survivors reached the border.

Glancing at the map, from Moscow to Khiva, it will be seen that the march of the Donskoi was a notable one—in the early seventeenth century. That was the time of the height of the Turkish power, and the Moghuls of India were still mighty.

Between these two the Uzbek and Turkoman khans and the Persians were fighting continuously. To march over the border of Islam in 1602 took a bit of nerve.

The attitude of Boris Godunov toward the Donskoi is about correct, historically.

The Tsars *did* send the Cossacks on just such hopeless missions. You may remember I told you about the Cossack Hetman, Platov who was sent in Napoleon's time across these same deserts to conquer India—with three or four thousand men! Some of them came back.

We are indebted to Captain Victor L. Kaledine *esaul* of the Don Cossacks, for the translation of the words to the "March of the Donskoi."—H. A. L.

AS TO the place and date of Buffalo Bill's birth. Hamilton Clark, Big Creek, California, kindly offered to send me a letter to one of his family, written and signed by Buffalo Bill himself, setting forth the facts. I had that brief letter copied and here it is:

Douglas, Arizona.
Oct. 27, 1910.

C. T. Stark,
Race, Arizona.

DEAR SIR: I was born in the town of Leclair, Scott Co., Iowa, February 26, 1846.—Yours truly—(signed) W. F. CODY.

AS TO the Aztecs. A word from John Murray Reynolds of our writers' brigade. I'm sort of mixed perhaps, but I thought it was only a year or two ago some one was telling us at Camp-Fire that the generally

accepted conclusion of the scientists was that the Aztecs and such did *not* come from Asia.

Brooklyn, New York.

A letter in your August 20th issue speaking of the Aztecs as though their origin was a great mystery moves me to reply. Archæology is a branch of science, and in spite of the fact that imagination is frequently of great value to a scientist (and in spite of a hearty agreement with Talbot Mundy's general remarks on imagination at the same Camp-Fire), it must be remembered that in science imagination should never be allowed to weaken consideration of the facts.

THE generally accepted conclusion among archæologists is that the Aztecs are merely one phase of a wave of invasion that came to the Americas from Asia and overspread both American continents. This is based upon the following:

1. All the inhabitants of this hemisphere before the coming of the whites (Eskimos excepted) were one racial stock. From the Indians of Labrador or Alaska all the way south to Cape Horn, the stock is the same—the so-called Ameridian race. There arose many different linguistic stocks, and many different types of life and culture, but these are due to isolation and must not be confused with racial differences. The differences in dialect and manner of life in our own country even in this day of rapid communication show how such differences tend to arise; it is easy to see how much more distinct they became when almost complete isolation prevented contact, intermarriage, and what is biologically termed "swamping."

2. Geological evidence shows indisputably that there have been no "land-bridges" across either the Atlantic or the Pacific for a long time, but that there has been communication with Asia across the "Bering Isthmus" and probably with Europe across Greenland and the northern ice to well within the time of man. (See Scott's "History of Land Mammals in the Western Hemisphere.")

3. The Eskimos probably came *via* Greenland, but the Ameridians most certainly did not come that way. They were people in a Neolithic stage of culture, and there was no similar race in Europe in Neolithic times, they therefore must have come *via* Alaska.

4. Not only do various branches of the Ameridian race show Mongoloid characteristics, but in addition there are certain now rather scarce tribes in Northeastern Siberia which have a very "Indian" appearance. Some of the pictures in the newspapers of various All-Russia Soviet conferences showed some of them.

WITH reference to the time at which this great migration occurred, it probably began somewhat subsequent to 7000 B.C., which is the time given by Professor Osborne as the period of the Middle Neolithic age. ("Men of the Old Stone Age," page 18.) It may very easily have been quite a lot later; the migrating Ameridians knew no metal weapons, but the use of metal may have reached that part of Asia whence they came far later than it did Europe.

The highly developed civilizations that arose in a few parts of the New World were entirely indigenous, such things take time and it was probably not till thousands of years later that these real civilizations developed. The earliest thing that can be dated with any degree of certainty in connection of the Mayas of Mexico is the Tuxtla Statuette which is placed at 113 B.C.; probably they did not become sedentary very long before that and an abandonment of nomadic habits is necessary to the growth of any such civilization as theirs. The most brilliant period of Maya supremacy was between 300 and 600 A.D. (See Spinden, "Ancient Civilizations of Mexico," page 130-135.)

SO FAR as the Aztecs themselves were concerned, they were probably an offshoot of the Maya nation, colonists who grew away from the mother nation, grew hardier, stronger, more warlike and more cruel, gained their independence, and eventually conquered the nation that had originally given them birth. A parallel is seen in the case of the Assyrians and Babylonians. The Aztecs themselves dated their history as a real power as from 1376 A.D. The Maya civilization was far superior, but had already become decadent and then fallen to its warlike offspring long before the Spaniards came.

One last point. Romantically attractive though it is, and stimulating to the imagination, the legend of Lost Atlantis fails to hold water. The best explanation of how this legend arose is given by James Baikie in "The Sea Kings of Crete," when he says it is probably based on the fall of the Minoan civilization that centered in Crete. He says:

"Almost certainly, then, Plato's story gives the Saite version of the actual Egyptian records of the greatness and final disaster of that great Island State with which Egypt so long maintained intercourse. Doubtless to the men of the Eighteenth Dynasty the sudden blotting out of Minoan trade and influence by the overthrow of Knossus seemed as strange and mysterious as though Crete had actually been swallowed up by the sea. . . . The statement that Lost Atlantis lay beyond the Pillars of Hercules is doubtless due to Solon's misinterpretation of what was said by his Egyptian informant, or to the Saite priest's endeavor to accommodate his ancient tradition to the wider geographical knowledge of his own time."

The above points are little more than sketched in. Will be glad to elaborate on them if any of it is questioned at Camp-Fire.—JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in next issue.*)

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: Issues for April and May, 1917. Would appreciate even the loan of them.—Address AMOS H. WEIGEL, Standard Publishing Co., 681 Fifth Ave., New York City.

WILL BUY: All issues of *Adventure* from 1910 to 1918. Will pay transportation.—Address L. H. JOHNSTON, 1117 Boyd St., Watertown, N. Y.

WILL SELL: 158 numbers from 1918 to 1924—covers intact. Best offer accepted. Buyer to pay postage.—Address C. T. GREENWOOD, 228 North Main St., Pleasantville, N. J.

WILL SELL: Issues for 1915—June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct.—1920—March 18, Aug. 3, Dec. 18—1921—all except Jan. 1, Mid-March, Mid-May, Mid-Sept.—1922—all except April 30—1923—all except May 20—1924—all except Sept. 30—1925—through Aug. 10. All or any part for best offer.—Address THOS. M. WATTS, 1535 Main St., Columbia, N. C.

WILL SELL: All issues, 1920 to date. Best offer accepted for any number of copies.—Address HENRY WILLYARD, R. F. D. No. 5, Marion, Ill.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding Stations to LAURENCE JORDAN.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

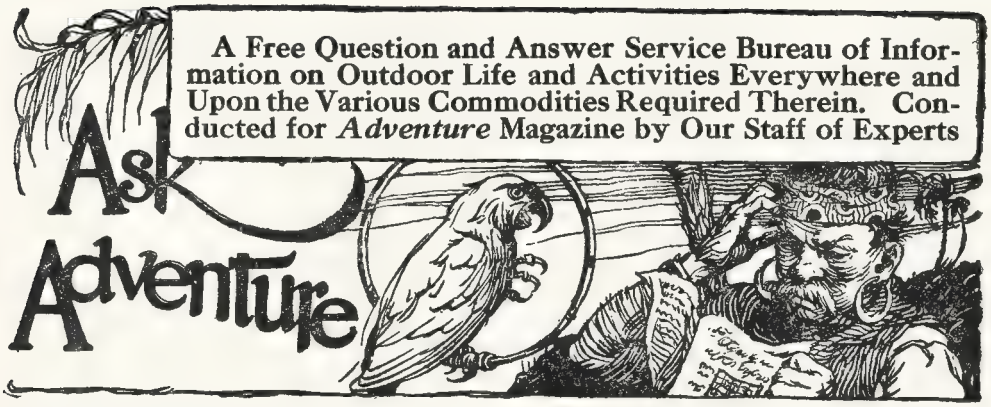
This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)



A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they not the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4—6. Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts
7, 8. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
9. Australia and Tasmania
10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
11. New Guinea
12, 13. Philippine and Hawaiian Islands
13—18. Asia. In Five Parts
19—26. Africa. In Eight Parts
27, 28. Turkey and Asia Minor
29—35. Europe. In Six Parts
36—38. South America. In Three Parts
39. Central America.
40—42. Mexico. In Three Parts
43—51. Canada. In Nine Parts
52. Alaska
53. Baffinland and Greenland
54—59. Western U. S. In Six Parts
60—64. Middle Western U. S. In Five Parts
65—74. Eastern U. S. In Ten Parts
A. Radio
B. Mining and Prospecting
C. Old Songs That Men Have Sung
D 1—3. Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
E. Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
F, G. Forestry in the U. S. and Tropical Forestry
H—J. Aviation, Army and Navy Matters
K. American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
L. First Aid on the Trail
M. Health-Building Outdoors
N. Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada
O. P. Herpetology and Entomology
Standing Information

Smoke Wagons

HOW to blue them.

Request:—"For many years I have read your articles and comments on smoke wagons, and it has all been good.

Now I don't know over much about guns, although I have toted a few, some were good, for instance, my pet thirty-eight Colt's double action, which same I wouldn't trade for any automatic on the market, and there were some that were fearfully and wonderfully made. I have used the Martini-Henry in the British army, (1892) and the Lee-Metford and Remington in the British navy and naval reserve, then I have handled the old single shot Springfield, and Krag Jorgenson, in the Philippines.

Was in a guard of honor in Old Manila, equipped with the old 45-70 and grounded arms on the cobblestones in the plaza, and about seventeen of them went off in the air. I don't know which was the worst end of those guns, all that was missing on them were the wheels, but the Krag was some gun, got one yet.

Now aside from all this preliminary, what I wanted to get was this, do you know of any reliable method of bluing guns? I ruined a good shotgun with nitric acid; it was a pale sky blue when I got finished with it, and rust, and rough, oh boy! then I sent away and got some prescription from the East, 'sure stuff, satisfaction guaranteed' price one buck, and enough for five guns; you warmed the gun and kind of poured it on and rolled the gun while doing it; it looked like it had been poured on all right, it was like black candle grease, and scraped right off with my thumbnail.

Some of the boys in the Rifle Assn. here say that it is a factory secret, mebbe so, I dunno, but I am leery of trying any more of these sure thing recipes till I hear from someone who knows.

May state that I am a forest ranger No. 294 and carried a commission for several years, and I love my guns, and like to keep them in shape. For your own information, will tell you of a stunt that I do to my guns, perhaps you never tried it, but I have done it for years, and I think it good. When I put a gun away for awhile, I clean it thoroughly inside and out, grease the inside, and dry the outside absolutely, then give it a good coat of "Johnson's Floor Wax" and polish it, that gives it an air tight coat which prevents rust, and the gun looks like new, the wax dries hard in a minute, and it is as slick as a whistle; however slick a whistle is I dunno, but that's the dope.

Any information on the above mentioned subject will be appreciated by yours truly"—George A. Stansfield, Olympia, Wash.

Reply, by Mr. Wiggins:—For a real good job of bluing I would send my gun to the makers, if possible.

In case that were impossible or inconvenient, I'd follow the following plan:

Send to the following firm:

Hoffman Chemical Co., Ardmore, Oklahoma, for a bottle of their bluing solution and follow the directions implicitly. I saw as fine a job done here by the local gunstore on a .30-30 Winchester carbine two years since as I ever saw, and it could have sold for a new gun, save for the interior condition of the bore.

The main thing seems to be to have the barrel and action perfectly free from grease and the old finish, then to keep both that and the solution hot, and use care in the polishing.

Personally, I may say I have never tried the stunt, but looked on while it was being done. It certainly seemed "*Hiyu Skookum.*"

Thank you for the endorsement of my work.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do NOT write to the magazine itself.

Fishing in Alaska

TROLLING, seining and other things.

Request:—"Here is a bunch of questions that I would like you to answer me. I am very much willing to pay you for your advices, as I would pay to a lawyer for his, whatever the charges will be.

1. How much does a good trolling outfit cost and can it be purchased in Ketchikan?
2. Can I troll alone, without a partner? My wife is determined to go and troll with me. She likes to be in the open, all right, but I would like to ask your opinion about this.
3. Do men troll in the open ocean or among the islands, and would you call it a dangerous occupation on account of the rough waters?
4. Does every man have his own place to troll or do they do it wherever they like to.
5. Are there always ready buyers of the fish, and has a man to arrange with them beforehand? Up here it is more easy to produce than to sell.
6. What is the cost of a good seining outfit?
7. Do the fish canneries, lumber mills and logging stop their activities in winter time?
8. What is the price per M. board feet of merchantable lumber?
9. What is a going wage of common labor?
10. If any houses of 3 to 5 rooms for sale in the town or close by, I would like to know the price of one or two.
11. Is there any farming and dairying done on a small scale, and is fresh milk for children easily obtainable?
12. What is an average price of land per acre? My relatives are interested if they can purchase a small island for fur farming.
13. What month is more suitable to come up there?
14. Would you advise to make an inspection trip or to move at one time the entire household from the teaspoon to the sewing machine and library?
15. Would you recommend better, Sitka or any other place?

Enclosed, please find 20 cents in postage stamps and self-addressed stamped envelope. One issue of Ketchikan's daily newspaper and any additional information on trapping, farming, fur farming, real estate and other industries will be greatly appreciated not only by myself but by quite a few

who are interested in that country. Naturally, as a prospective settler, I would like to know as much as I can the possibilities of that region. Please do not give my name and address." ——, Tamoa, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—You've got this Ask Adventure service all wrong, Brother; it's free, just so you don't make us pay postage. Your willingness to pay a fee for the information you wish, is commendable, I assure you, but you are coming to the right shop for your service for it costs you nothing—we are here to answer all questions as far as we are able, for the price of a two-cent stamp, because *Adventure* Magazine maintains this department solely to help its readers, whether they are subscribers or not.

Replies to your questions follow in their order:

(1) Trolling craft here varies in size from a 26-ft. boat, with 7 ft. beam and 3½ ft. draft, motored with a 6-horse gas engine of heavy-duty type, up to a 36-ft. boat with 8 ft beam and 4 ft. draft, having a 15 h. p. engine. They may be purchased here—used, but in good condition. Or, there are builders who make one according to your model.

A used 26-footer such as above and fitted complete with all gear, including a $50 power-reel, or "gurdy," sells for around $750 or $1000 depending on her condition and type of engine. A 36-footer sells for from $800 up to $1500. You may pick up a boat that will troll all right for $500, if you happen to catch the owner needing cash. Fall is the best time to buy—in the spring everyone is out trolling and boats are hard or impossible to find, except old hulls which are dangerous to use. They may be obtained in Seattle, or Tacoma, perhaps for less and run up here. There is a fishing fleet which operates off the west coast of Vancouver Island, that runs out from Seattle.

(2) These trolling boats are mostly operated as one-man affairs, but the cabin of a 36-footer is roomy enough for two men, and they often go double, or many men take their wives with them; she gets the meals and sees to it that he has plenty to eat (often neglected when the fishing is best) and runs the boat into port, allowing him to clean his day's catch without trouble. In fact, she is a very decided help, or can be, if she happens to be the right sort of helpmate.

(3) The trolling is done wherever the king salmon "runs," and he runs at different places during the year. The first fishing is done in April and May and the salmon are then mostly outside, on the western waters off the outer islands, and 20 to 30 miles out into the Pacific over certain "shoals," or "banks." That outside trolling is generally unsafe for the smaller boats, but the 32 and 36-footers are the ones that can navigate it O.K. and incidentally make the best hauls as a rule. Also, the better engine power enables them to ice their fish and run into town with their catch, if they happen to find salmon where there is no buyer's boat stationed. During mid-summer, the salmon run more inside and the trolling is then carried on in among the islands and closer to town and the mainland. These boats are what is called an "altered Columbia River model," and are very staunch and sea-worthy, and will ride out any ordinary gale. Trollers lie inside snug harbors, during stormy weather, so it is not what may be termed a "dangerous" pursuit, in any sense.

(4) The fleet may generally be found working together, and at any place where the fish are running best. Each man works for himself, and it is a cut-throat game, where each man tries to take the most fish. Every troller is watching his neighbors. If he sees a boat catching, he at once heads for him and it is a fact that if you work in astern of a boat your spoons, or herring bait, will take the fish from him. He'll likely cast back and take them from you, and so it goes. It is impossible to get information from one of them, as to where they are fishing or if the fish are plentiful, whether they are trolling at 15 fathoms or at 20, whether they are catching more on spoons, or herring, etc., etc.

I AM TELLING IN THESE LETTERS STUFF THAT YOU CANNOT FIND OUT HERE FROM TROLLERS; NOR IN ANY WAY, EXCEPT BY ACTUALLY GOING OUT AND LEARNING FOR YOURSELF.

(5) All fish dealers at the towns buy all fish in any quantity, and at any time. They have buyer's boats to go out to the various grounds and purchase the fish as they are caught each day for cash. Some of these buyer's boats are run independently, but all pay the market price at the time, whatever it may be. The demand is steady at all times. The salmon are decreasing in number, year by year, and the demand in the States is increasing, as is true also in Europe and all over the world. They'll buy for cash, if you bring in 30 tons, which runs into real money at 14c a pound (price on grounds—16c in towns which rises in fall to 20c or 25c).

(6) The engines required by these larger boats cost from $1500 to $2000.

The hulls and net and other gear would bring that cost up quite a bit more, so that the cost runs from around $2000 for the smaller and less trustworthy craft up to $10,000, or even $15,000. Small outfits of perhaps 40-foot size, with less expensive engines and carrying three or four men, with a small "web" and one dory, might be bought for the lesser price.

(7) Canneries begin their pack on July 5th and are closed by Territorial law on August 20th. This is done to safeguard the fish during spawning. Logging is prosecuted at all times during the year, and likewise all sawmills.

(8) Rough spruce sheathing is sold in Ketchikan at the mill, for $24 M.

(9) Common (unskilled) labor can get $5 a day—dock and street work, etc.

Skilled labor, carpenters, mechanics, electricians, etc. get $7-$10 a day, for eight hours. Cannery help (white) $75 to $150 a month, or 45c an hour; natives generally contract at so much per case.

(10) Such houses are selling close in for $3500 to $5000—out through Newtown, a mile up the shore, but on a regular 25c bus line, and connected with city water and light, the price drops around $500, with fair lots out there for $250 to $300—50 x 150 feet.

(11) There is a dairy across the Narrows (1000 yards) from town, which furnishes fresh milk daily. It is the only one here, restaurants serving canned milk on their tables, as a rule. This dairy took up a homestead and their cows run at large, with access to the beach and the salt sea-weed.

(12) You can take up all the land you can work, either as homestead under Forest Service regulations; or as a mineral claim; or by leasing, at $5 a year for small acreage; or in the case of islands

suitable for fox farming—at $25 a year. This is all handled under the Dept. of Agriculture and administered by the Tongass National Forest supervisor's office in Ketchikan. Homesteading is done here exactly the same as down in the States, without red tape or any other restrictions and many are being taken and proved up, right now. Fox farming islands must be examined by the Forest officers and then you are granted a lease from the government, at the $25 rental, or lease, regardless of size of island, I understand. Some 150 islands taken, but hundreds left.

OUR fur is said to be the best in world. The Paterson Island farm made the first shipment from this section last year, and I heard the entire shipment went to Europe. A local dealer bought a few skins and I've seen them. They are large, fine color, dark maltese, with long outer hair and thick under fur, very glossy. This dealer will sell these pelts at from $225 to $250, according to size and color, but they vary but little. The Aleutian pelts, or around Cook Inlet farther north and where the island breeding started, are very inferior to these, due it is said to careless feeding. I saw some of these pelts the other day and they are small, thin-furred, poor and light color, and scrawny. You should have not less than $3000 to start at this industry. Breeders cost not less than $300 a pair—you must have a good gas boat for transportation and for trolling for salmon, to smoke and feed—your buildings consist of suitable living quarters, with a good smoke-house and perhaps a boat dock or float—and you must purchase certain other outfit, besides your grub. It takes at least four years before you can safely start pelting. Each vixen generally pups once a year and has 6 to 12 in a litter, but at least three years is allowed them, and four is better and then you pelt mostly males.

(13) The weather is getting pretty settled April first, the trollers are starting out then, and the halibut fishers start out April 15th, while all work is getting under way, except of course the canneries, but they are setting a few men at work on odd jobs by May first to get in shape, and their pile-drivers are out driving on the traps, etc. Last of March, or first of April are O.K. to come and get acquainted.

(14) Whether to take up your bed and walk up here, or to send on a scout first, is naturally entirely up to you. I can't say just what sort of outfit you have, or how situated, nor how much of a stake you have to swing. I wrote a friend last spring, who has a wife and three kids, one a baby of about 8 months; he got my letter April 2nd and was in town here on April 14th, having come from Chicago. He had around $2000, and thinks this country is what he has been always looking for—but he is as yet just looking around and sizing things up. I think he wants to go trolling. Another man wired me last June and came right on up with his wife from Los Angeles; has bought a 26-foot troller and is now out learning the game. I heard from him last week and he had taken 20 kings and 40 cohoe salmon in his first three days of fishing. He is gaining weight and looks as if he had found his life-work, for he can't keep the grins wiped out. You see that trolling is cracker-jack *sport*, in addition to being a money-maker, and this is really about the healthiest and most beautiful country of which I know.

(15) We have the biggest trolling fleet along the coast and have the edge on Juneau, our capital town, in population. A fleet runs out of Petersburg, next north of us, some from Wrangel, and Juneau, and a few from Sitka, but our market is the surest and pays better prices. So, I can hardly recommend any other coast town for what you are inquiring.

Candidly, I think it would be wiser if you have a family, to take a run up here first and size matters up. Come in March, which will permit you a few weeks of inquiry and checking up, and still give you time to send for the others. You might get things well located for them, so they'd have no lost motion, besides bearing less heavy on the old purse.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Bear Hunting in Pennsylvania

AN POTTER COUNTY is also noted for its luxuriant leek fields.

Request:—"As a constant reader of *Adventure* I would greatly appreciate some information relative to bear hunting in Pennsylvania.

We heard that Potter and Pike counties were good territory and would like to learn of some camp or guide we could book with for the opening week of the season. If you could give us some information relative to this we would be greatly indebted."—CRAIG SANDFORD, Flushing, L. I.

Reply, by Mr. Barbour:—Your letter has followed me from New York down here into the tropics, which makes my reply rather late in reaching you.

I can't speak of first hand knowledge of the bear hunting in Pike County, as I have never hunted there. The interior of that country is plenty wild, as I know from a long horseback trip I once took, and my recollection is that I heard of both bear and deer hunting.

Potter County is good hunting. So is Elk, a little further west, which happens to be my home county.

Bear hunting in western Pa. is a hard game, as I can testify. There are undoubtedly bear; in fact they are increasing, but the country is a mass of briars and brush since the lumbermen left, and a bear always picks the meanest country to roam over. Finding one is largely a matter of luck, as they don't use bear dogs.

Wish I could go with you.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Cuba

AN WHERE you must know Spanish.

Request:—"All I know about Cuba is that it belongs to the United States and that they raise sugar and coffee down there. For some time it has been my ambition to be connected with a sugar or packing company in Cuba. I know sugar is a big industry and I believe there is more of a chance there than in the crowded industries here. I'd like to know if there is much of a demand for white help and perhaps you will refer me to one or two companies who need the services of such. I am young and should have no trouble in learning. Also something

about the country, its people, how they work and climate. Are there many white people there? Thanking you very kindly in advance."—MICHAEL WHALLER, Springfield, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. Montgomery:—Cuba is a republic and has a government along the lines of that of the United States.

You are right about sugar being raised here, in fact the sugar industry is the one big tning.

The population of Cuba is over three million of which about eight hundred thousand are colored, the balance white.

To secure employment in Cuba with some of the concerns here it would be best to advertise in some sugar journal or secure a copy of "The Times of Cuba" ($0.30) from Mr. E. F. O'Brien, Avenida de la República 95 Habana Cuba and obtain the names of the representatives of the various companies, then write them stating your qualifications.

There is some demand for foreign help here in Cuba but one thing is imperative, that is knowledge of Spanish.

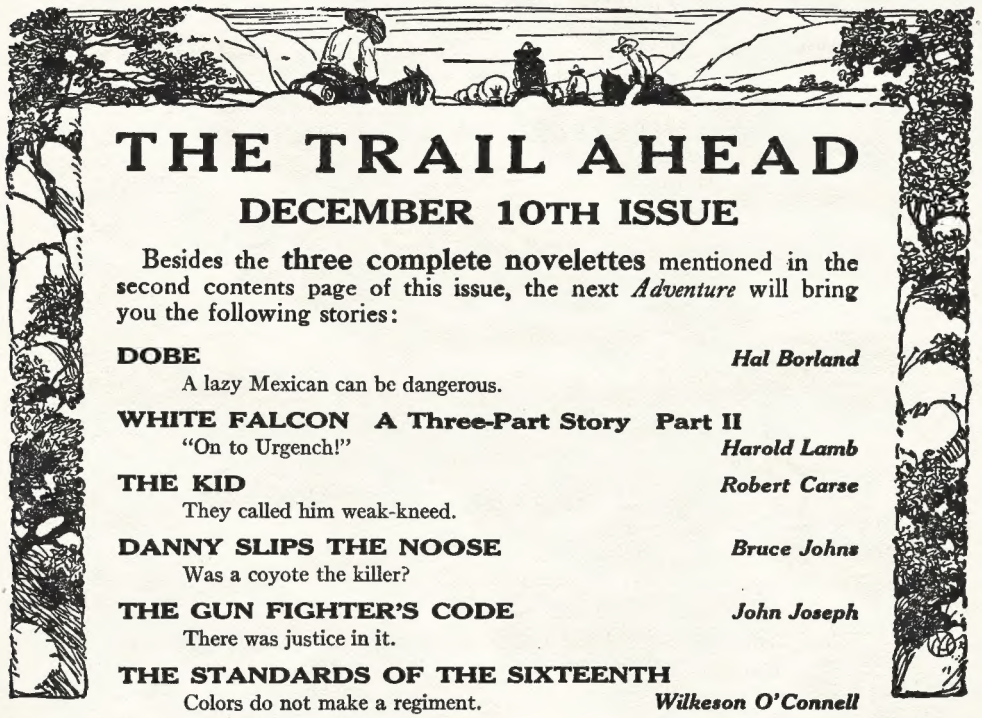
You will find Cuba a very modern country; however, I would not suggest you come down here to look for work as nearly all concerns employ their men from application and personal visits to representatives usually in the home office.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.



THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain long stories by Norman Springer, Harold Lamb, Gordon MacCreagh, Arthur O. Friel, Gordon Young, Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, J. D. Newsom, Leonard H. Nason, E. S. Pladwell, J. Allan Dunn, and David R. Sparks; and short stories by Bill Adams, Fiswoode Tarleton, Tom Gill, Charles Victor Fischer, Post Sargent, John Murray Reynolds, Alan LeMay, Captain Dingle and others.

"The Man They Hanged"

Who Was He?

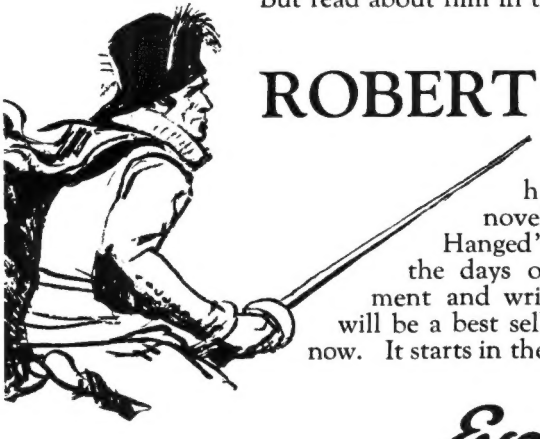
They called him a bloody pirate—murderer—cutthroat—thief. They accused him of every crime they could invent. They blackened his name, disgraced his family . . . Before a false court he was tried. Perjured witnesses swore against him. A craven judge denied him justice. He was convicted, sentenced and hanged—to save the very nobles he had served, innocently, honestly and too trustingly.

Who was he?—this gallant, fearless gentleman, this splendid sea captain? His name was Captain William Kidd, and he . . .

But read about him in the thrilling story, "The Man They Hanged."

It's by

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS



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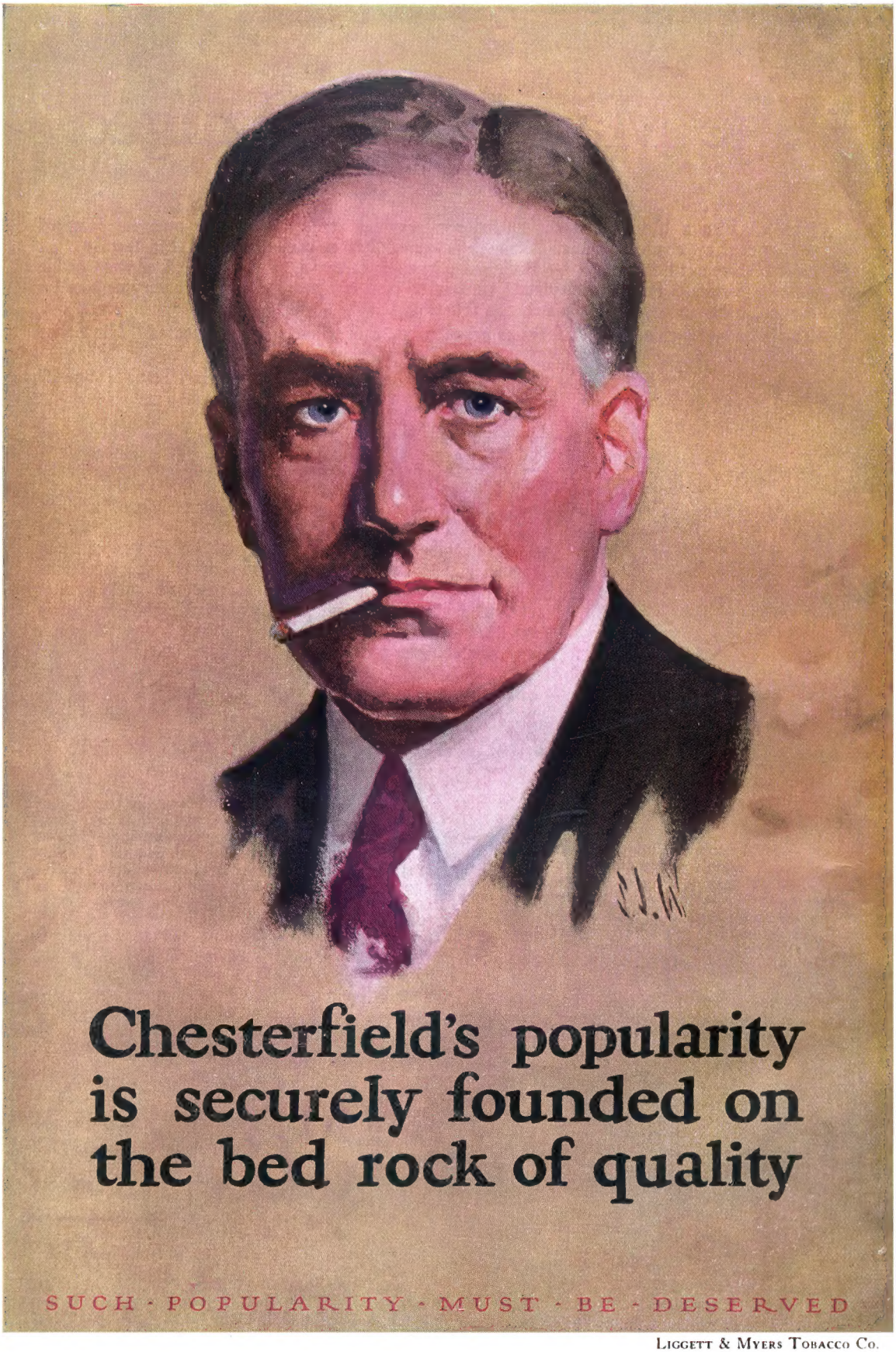

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